

**THE PLACE AND ROLE OF WOMEN AS DEPICTED IN PROVERBS AMONG  
THE KARANGA CULTURE OF ZAKA DISTRICT IN ZIMBABWE.**

**BY**

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### **THE PLACE AND ROLE OF WOMEN AS DEPICTED IN PROVERBS AMONG THE KARANGA CULTURE OF ZAKA DISTRICT OF ZIMBABWE.**

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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## **SUMMARY**

This study investigates the place of the Shona-Karanga women as reflected in Shona proverbs concerning women. Reviewed literature covers the world, African and Zimbabwean perspectives on women. It discusses and examines changes in the role and status of Shona –Karanga women in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. The study examines men's attitude towards women, women's attitude towards themselves and women's responsibilities in Shona-Karanga communities in relation to Shona proverbs. Proverbial statements discussed were from participants and other sources. Government's effort in improving the women's status was examined. The study uses mixed research methods of data generation and presentation. Research findings show that women lost their glory during the colonial period but the blame is levelled against Karanga culture which actually holds women with high esteem. The study established that most participants were ignorant of proverbs concerning women. The research was an eye opener to women about the tremendous potential they have.

### **KEY TERMS**

Shona-Karanga women, Shona proverbs, role and status of women, power and influence, misconception, Western culture, African culture, Shona communities, families, gender roles, males and females, men.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my son Munyaradzi and to my late parents Patrick and Angela Chisadza.

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# **1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Background of the study**

This research study aims to investigate the place and role of women in Shona societies with special reference to the Karanga people of Zaka District of Masvingo province in the southern part of Zimbabwe in relation to Shona proverbs in the past and today. It also seeks to identify Shona proverbs concerning women and explain what they meant in the traditional Shona culture so as to demystify the general view and belief by most people today that the cultural teachings oppress women and foster a dependence syndrome in most African women.

It is a common view among many Zimbabwean people, including women that women ought to depend on their husbands or male counterparts for sundry forms of support. As a result, once a woman is divorced or if the husband dies, the woman quickly remarries so as to find another ‘pillar’ of support to lean on. At present, the Karanga, if not all Shona women are viewed as ‘the other’- weaker sex and subordinated group and the language used today in Shona discourse perpetuates the marginalisation and relegation of women to second class citizens. However, the traditional Karanga culture does not view women as such. This misconception is a Eurocentric perspective of the Shona culture which is a fabrication of truth. Many people believe this misconception about the way of life of Shona women.

This research study seeks to investigate Karanga proverbs and explore the light they shed on the Karanga concept of gender. The research also argues that the Shona-Karanga culture promotes and perpetuates equality through the complement of duties between men and women as is proven by research evidence. The Shona–Karanga culture teaches children from a tender age to recognise this complementarity of duties through their play and simple chores which they carry out. Both girls and boys are viewed and taught to participate equally in

family and community life from tender age and their duties complement each other making both sexes feel equally important in Shona societies.

In the light of the evidence, the study seeks to prove that the phenomenon in a family where the male child is preferred to the female child and where males rule females by right of birth is foreign and not indigenous to the Shonas, especially, the Karanga people. The fact that the female child is further discriminated against due to the fact that she eventually marries out and joins another family whilst the male child perpetuates the survival of the family name through bringing additional members into the family is a misconception that the research proves incorrect. This cultural myth has been propagated by Europeans and has seen some parents preferring to educate boys to girls. A close study of the traditional Shona proverbs concerning women portrays the correct role and place of women in Shona societies.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Many people in the Karanga communities of Zaka district of Masvingo province in the southern part of Zimbabwe have a misconception of the role and place of women in Shona culture. This has resulted in males looking down upon females, and females accepting the second class status, thus having low self - esteem and failing to realise their full potential in the family, community and national affairs and depending on males for their livelihood. Both men and women blame this state of affairs on African culture. Today, with new developments in feminism, organisations promoting women's welfare and development and gender studies in the country's Colleges of Education and Universities, a more vicious onslaught on African culture for women's predicament is loud and clear yet, a close study of Shona-Karanga proverbs on women shows that women are considered important members of the family and community.

Most women and men have a misconception of Shona-Karanga culture and use it to justify the oppression of women by their male counterparts. The majority of women share the same misconception and look at Western culture, the money economy and women's liberation movements and organisations as the panacea to their predicament. Most women are ignorant of the power and high status vested in them by the Shona-Karanga culture. This ignorance has been perpetuated by the fact that both Shona-Karanga men and women do not know and value Shona figurative language, especially proverbs concerning women. For want of sophistication and modernity, they both view the study of figurative language as backward and embarrassing yet it is rich in Karanga customs and traditions and gives women their correct status.

Africans in general feel that their culture is inferior due to imperialist racism which elevates European culture at the expense of local culture which they demonise. This study therefore, seeks to educate both men and women on the correct status and roles accorded to women by Shona-Karanga culture through the study of Shona proverbs on women in Shona traditional culture. It also seeks to examine how women lost their glory with the coming of Western culture and the money economy. This study suggests how this status can be regained through an appreciation of Shona-Karanga culture. This will help women to believe in themselves and contribute as important compatriots to the socio-economic and political matters of their families, communities and the nation. Karanga women need to eliminate the dependency syndrome and be able to sustain themselves and their families even in the absence of their husbands.

### **1.3 Aim of the study**

This research study aims at reconstructing the traditional status accorded to Shona-Karanga women in African culture through the study of Shona-Karanga proverbs that concern women. It seeks to change the attitude of men towards women and women towards themselves and correct the misconception that African culture looks down upon women and perpetuates a

dependency syndrome among Karanga women on their husbands or men for survival. The study also enables the Karanga women to reclaim their lost status and capacitates them to fully contribute towards family, community, and national development. It also helps to unpack and correct colonial myths and restore the dignity of Karanga women.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this research study are:

- 1.4.1.** To explore proverbs and African philosophy relating to the role and status of women in Karanga societies,
- 1.4.2.** To correct the misconception that African culture oppresses women and treats them as second class citizens,
- 1.4.3.** To assist the Karanga women regain their lost status,
- 1.4.4.** To conscientise the Karanga people of the original position of women in society,
- 1.4.5.** To foster in Karanga women a culture of self-sufficiency, and raise their self-esteem so that they can achieve their full potential in life.

#### **1.5 Research questions**

This research study attempts to answer the following research questions;

- 1.5.1** What roles and status is accorded women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe?
- 1.5.2** How and why did the status of women change during the colonial period?
- 1.5.3** How and why did the status of women change during the post-colonial period in Zimbabwe?
- 1.5.4** What status does the outside world accord to African (Shona) women today?
- 1.5.5** What status does Zimbabwean men accord Zimbabwean women today?

### **1.5.6 How do Karanga women view themselves today?**

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The status of women in Zimbabwe today is a topical issue and a lot has been done to try and uplift women to positions of influence and leadership. The government of Zimbabwe has since the attainment of Independence embarked on a deliberate initiative to improve the status of women in this country. This led to the development and pronouncements of policies such as Affirmative Action (introduced at the University of Zimbabwe in 1995) which in part sets aside a quarter for women in all spheres of life such as education, politics, leadership, commerce and industry, (Mushawatu : 2017). Non- governmental and civic organisations such as The Musasa project, the Girl Child Network; have also joined the bandwagon as ‘good Samaritans’ to improve the status of women whom they perceive to have been marginalised for so long. Nevertheless, more still needs to be done.

Blame for this state of affairs has been levelled squarely on Shona culture. Both Zimbabwean men and women themselves think that the relegation of women to second class citizen status is a result of the oppressive Shona culture, which in many people’s (both Zimbabweans and Westerners) opinion should be abandoned, discarded into the dustbins of injurious history where it rightfully belongs or changed. The onslaught on African Shona-Karanga culture can be heard even louder in these days of feminism and new religious movements. Yet the current status of African women is a result of western influence and thought patterns and misconceptions about African culture, which unfortunately has been embraced by many Zimbabweans; both male and female.

## **1.7 Scope of the study**

There are many dialects of the Shona language and various forms of figurative language in Shona discourse. By the same token, Shona proverbs deal with a wide range of issues. This research focuses on Karanga dialect and Shona-Karanga proverbs that relate to women. The

participants were drawn from selected Karanga men and women of various social and economic classes and backgrounds in Zaka district of Masvingo province of Zimbabwe.

The research project is divided into six (6) chapters. Chapter one introduces the research. It presents the background, justification, aims of the research, research questions and scope of the study. Chapter two deals with related literature and discusses insights gained from literature review. Chapter three presents the theoretical framework. It discusses the theories that guide and inform the research such as Afrocentricity, Africana womanism, and feminism. Chapter four presents, discusses and analyses research findings. Chapter five discusses the data presented. Chapter six is the conclusion and consists of the summary of the research, recommendations, and suggested areas for further research.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter introduces the research. It presents the background, justification, aims of the research, research questions and scope of the study. It also highlights the perceptions men have towards women and women's own perceptions of themselves. The researcher claims that the study of Shona proverbs that concerns women will correct misconceptions about women and Shona-Karanga culture and place women in their rightful position and raise their ego, thus boosting their self confidence.



## **2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Many countries including Zimbabwe have different perceptions about the status of women. It is a general world view today that women are looked down upon (Di Cesare, 2014). This is attributed to a variety of reasons. Various women movements have attempted to address this problem in various ways, achieving different levels of success.

### **2.2 Global perspectives on women**

Many countries and scholars worldwide have different views regarding the status of women. Some views conflict but others do agree that women indeed are relegated citizens as compared to their male counterparts. On one hand, these negative views led to the rise of the feminist movements such as radical feminist movement which holds the man as responsible for the dilemma the woman is in today. On the other hand, it has also led to the rise of contradictory movements such as the Africana Womanism grounded in African culture which does not blame men for women's predicament but focuses on injustices and realities within the society.

Referring to a female Australian politician's views, Paxton and Hughes (2007), note that women's role was to be wives and mothers. Kelber (1994) in Paxton and Hughes (ibid) states that in the eighteenth century, Sir William Blackstone grouped women with lunatics, idiots, minors, aliens, perjurers and criminals adding that women were not allowed to vote. In the same way, in colonial Zimbabwe, women were considered minors and were not allowed to vote. Perry and Perry (1994) also note that worldwide, women were only granted the full right to vote in the twentieth century, after the end of the First World War. Women had played a decisive role in armament industries as well as knitting stockings for Allied Powers' soldiers leading to victory against the Central Powers (Lowe, 2005). Paxton and Hughes (ibid) further note that in the United States of American politics, women are still under represented. Perry and Perry (ibid) also made the same observation when they realise that women around the

world hold no more than ten percent seats in legislatures and the scenario has not improved much yet. Conversely, men are well above eighty percent. Perry and Perry (ibid) further describe various situations in countries such as India which legalises abortion where statistics show that female foetuses are aborted more than male foetuses.

In China due to high birth rates, female foetus abortion is also high. In Asia when food is scarce, female children are deliberately neglected through short breastfeeding period and less nourishing meals than those of male children so that they die and male children survive (Perry and Perry, ibid). These incidents reflect how some nations degraded and still degrade the female species.

Perry and Perry (ibid) assert that Indian women have no rights to vote neither do they have freedom of choice when it comes to employment. In Muslim countries, women are not allowed to drive and come in contact with men. Perry and Perry (ibid) further argue that Muslim women have to cover themselves from head to toe in public, eat separately from men and eat only after serving male relatives first. Thus the relegation of the female species in many eastern and western societies is very common and is generally regarded as normal. This is unlike Karanga culture which views women as men's counterparts with considerable influence over their men.

Donald (2015) notes that ninety-three percent (93%) in China and sixty- seven percent (67%) Europeans still think lowly of their women- rating them incapable of becoming scientists and attributing women's plight to cultural factors. According to Euro-news (2018), while gender equality is improving, there is still serious violence against women in Europe which may arise from men's low estimate of women in the continent. Culture is not universal, so to conclude that women are despised in all cultures and include African- Karanga culture will be over

generalising. It is some Western cultures which look down upon women but the African woman is a self-definer with her own experiences different from the western woman's.

Paxton and Hughes (op cit) note that women in Orthodox Judaism are not counted in a quorum required for public prayer called minyan. For the same reason, in Jesus' time, when Jesus fed the five thousand, this number excluded women and children (Matthew 14 verse 21). In traditional Buddhism, a woman could not go to heaven through her own merit; neither could the woman worship by herself and could not go to heaven except through unquestioning obedience to her husband even if the husband was wicked. This demonstrates how much women are objectified in the eastern countries, which is not the case in African-Karanga Indigenous religion.

These views by the scholars above reflect Western line of thinking on women and do not consider views from other cultures and women's experiences and status in Africa which may be different from culture to culture. The scholars are also using their observations in Western countries as a yardstick to measure all women in the world yet Shona culture as reflected by its proverbs and some lived experiences reflect the power and value given to women. This research study seeks to prove that traditional Shona culture attaches great importance to women. Through the study of Shona proverbs pertaining to women, the research study reveals Karanga women's experiences which place them at a privileged position than those reflected by Western views on women.

Traditional Shona-Karanga culture does not look down upon women. Instead, women are of great value and are involved in important decision making in most traditional Shona families and communities. For instance, the aunt (one's father's sister) is a very important person in the life of her brother's family and is responsible for sex education of her nieces and acts as an intermediary between the children and their parents in all important matters (Gelfand 1973).

She is also considered the owner of her brother's wife and the children because her bride price brings wealth to her maternal home and is used to pay for her brother's wife. This still exists and it gives the aunt high status within her own lineage, especially among her brother's children since their birth is purchased by the bride price received from her marriage (Bourdillon, 1976) hence the proverb *Vatete ndibabakadzi* (An aunt is a female father).

Gombe (1998) makes the same observation that the aunt (tete) has powers which almost exceeds that of men in a family. Most important Shona family functions such as marrying off daughters and distribution of the deceased brother's estate cannot be carried out in the absence of the aunt. In agreement with Paxton and Hughes (op cit), Stevens (2007) notes that traditionally, women in the United States were confined to the domestic sphere of life, reproduction and bringing up children, while men controlled power and the means of production. The status of United Kingdom women is still determined by the husband's occupation, for instance, the queen only wields her political power upon marrying the king. In traditional Shona culture, child-bearing and nurturing are virtues to be celebrated as alluded to by some Shona proverbs concerning women such as *Unaki hwemukadzi huri pamwana* (The beauty of a wife lies in child-bearing).

The proverb portrays women as perpetuators of posterity while on the other hand, it may imply the bitter experiences of women who cannot bear children for their husbands. One of Marshal Munhumumwe's greatest hit a song, of 1994-1996 '*Mbereko Yakaramba*' (barrenness) portrays how severely undermined is a barren woman's dignity for failing to ensure the continuity of the male-line. These women sooner or later lose favour of their husbands and the Shona society has ways of consoling such women. The Shona culture permits the woman to bring in her young sister or the brother's daughter to come and bear children for the barren woman, (Gombe, ibid) hence genuine sisterhood is displayed in such circumstances. The first wife continues enjoying high status and respect of her husband,

making all important decisions in the family as before. So the two virtues namely childbearing and nurturing; as reflected through the study of Shona proverbs concerning women, are not a form of punishment as some feminists would like to suggest.

Schmidt (1992) studied Zimbabwean women from 1870 to 1939 – a period when Zimbabwe was under colonisation by whites and refers to the views expressed by father Hartmann; one of her informants that shows that women were inferior to men and were considered almost non-existent. This view is incorrect and emanated from a misunderstanding of African culture by a European missionary. The general impression that emerges from Schmidt's (ibid) work is that the information she obtains from Western informants (who purport to know African culture) portrays a negative image about the status of women in Zimbabwe. When the informants are Africans, the picture that emerges in the same book is a positive one. This does not mean that African informants glorify African culture. Instead, as Africans, they have a better understanding and insights into their own culture.

One of Schmidt's (ibid) major weaknesses is that she is not African and depended largely on Western informants, Western scholars, and Western financial support as seen in her book's acknowledgements. This led to the publication of wrong African social history by whites who intended to justify the occupation of Africa in general as they regarded Africa as a dark continent with men who ill-treated women. Schmidt (ibid) sometimes doubts some of her Western informants' interpretations of the information they obtained. This misconception led to the marginalisation of African women and culture.

Rather than depending on secondary information, Schmidt (ibid) could have gone into the field to study African culture as portrayed by women's way of life, including art, music and proverbs. Interacting with the women themselves and studying Shona figurative language

including proverbs pertaining to women would have given her correct and more information about the value and power women have in African traditional Karanga societies.

### **2.3 African perspectives on women**

Although there are some mixed views about women in Africa, most studies by different scholars reflect the African society as an egalitarian society where women enjoy the same status as men. Females are portrayed as being at par with their male counterparts in all spheres of life; be it social, political or economic. African culture as some scholars would want to believe is regarded as oppressive of women whilst other scholars attribute the low status of African women today to colonisation of Africa.

Writing about African women, Rogers (1980) on one hand, notes that in pre-colonial times, women controlled important areas like land, its use, distribution and use of crops grown on the land; having their own fields and own crops. On the other hand, the most important role determined by their biological make up, is child bearing and up- bringing while men are heads of the family, spokespersons with the outside world and with whom planners dealt. (It should be noted that while men were spokespersons, they spoke what they were told to speak by the women; a situation prevalent in most homes today). This leaves women with invisible considerable power and control over men. He further correctly blames Western gender roles that are taken as natural ‘the right and universal’ in Africa and are used to oppress women.

Thus, the problem of the relegation of women is not coming from African culture, but with the African’s perception and application of Western gender roles that are in support of male ideology. Amadiume (2005) agreeing with Rogers (1980) also notes that the colonial experience brought about Western gender practices and perceptions which affected the participation of African women in their traditional way of life. It also affected them in the

advancement of their own communities and led to the marginalisation of the female species. Colonialism also led to the disempowerment of women economically and politically.

Mazama (2007) also observes that for African women, colonisation also brought about racial inferiority to women as well as gender insubordination. Mazama, (ibid) further notes that a thorough investigation has to be made for one to understand African culture since a non-African may never understand and will only undermine the real and authentic facts at hand. Rogers (1980), Amadiume (2005) and Mazama (2007) realise the power that is bestowed upon African women through their culture which agrees with the line of argument of this research study. However, since proverbs reflect people`s lived experiences, a closer study of Shona proverbs pertaining to women would have enriched their contribution. This would also have assisted them by precisely defining the African women by what she went through.

Mbiti (1969) shows the power of African women through the story of the queen of Luvedu of South Africa, who was a supreme rainmaker amongst the Zulus. The queen was a divine political head and her moods were believed to determine the weather conditions in the kingdom. Mbiti`s observation shows the power bestowed upon African women in African religion as opposed to the Westerners` views which portray women as helpless without men. Ranger cited in Low and Tremayne (2001) also recognises the similar power bestowed upon women of Malawi in Chewa religion. Influential rainmakers were women who took control of Malawian rain shrines.

Ranger cited in Low and Tremayne (ibid) further notes that between 900 and 1600 CE, rainmakers were very influential and these female religious leaders had the capacity to communicate with God. Priestess Chauta is an example of such powerful rainmakers in Malawi and these rainmakers would be assisted by priests` wives to perform their duties. In Zambian religious cults, women also played significant roles such as rainmaking. Water is a

source of life and anyone in control of it is a 'deity.' So, although men were also rainmakers, the most popular were women. Ranger cited in Low and Tremayne (ibid) agrees with Mazama (op cit) that the African women were indeed very powerful and influential since they participated in issues that determined the life of people in communities they lived. Water is the source of life and all living things revolve around it so those (women) who provided it were of great importance. Some proverbs about women could have been drawn from such important roles.

Meena (1992) notes that many African scholars consider feminism - a broad term for a variety of conceptions of the relations between men and women in society as a foreign importation with little or no relevance to the African situation. She also argues that the notion of domestication of women is alien to the real, practical life of the African woman. The African woman looks at her man as one who complements her in her duties and was so considerate that he would not oppress his woman.

The African woman ideology does not consider men as primary enemies as does the white feminist ideology which views men as oppressors who dominate and overpower women (Hudson-Weems; 1998). Meena (ibid) further notes that the roles and duties women perform do not mean that they are docile or dependent, a view that is also revealed by Karanga proverbs on women, such as, *Mukadzi igonzo* (a woman is a rat) meaning that she feeds for the family. The status a woman acquires upon marriage is not only that of a wife but a provider for her new family (Bourdillon, op cit).

The proverb *Nhumbu mukadzi mukuru hairevi chayadya* (A stomach is like an elderly woman who does not disclose secrets) portrays women as great custodians of community secrets and this reflects the amount of power women hold in keeping the community intact. According to Muponde and Taruvinga (2002), women with their midwifery skills held and kept a lot of



secrets which they never divulged to the husband of the woman giving birth or to her parents. It is believed that if the woman is promiscuous during pregnancy she has to confess for her to deliver safely and such confessions are not divulged so as to protect the husband and the family's pride. The midwives who occupied the labour hut never divulged the confessions made by women in labour thereby remaining custodians of the deepest secrets of their communities hence they should not be underrated. This promotes peace and unity amongst Shona-Karanga communities of the time.

However, Mannathoko in Meena (op cit) argues that feminism is not a Western ideology reflecting Western culture. The oppression of women was evident in some pre-colonial practices like giving women in marriage, sending women as tribute, trading in women, taking women in battle and selling them. So feminism was necessary to correct some Shona cultural practices of the pre-colonial times. She locates women's oppression in the African tradition; colonial and post-colonial periods. Wanyeki (2003) shares the same view with Mannathoko and refers to Ethiopia where women are labelled as crafty and long-tongued if they exhibit any intelligence. Bonevack and Phillips (1992) cited in Paxton and Hughes (op cit) quote an Ethiopian teacher of the seventeenth century who presented women as weak by nature and less intelligent than men.

Wanyeki (ibid) further describes women in Ethiopia as weak and treacherous and could only perform their duties through forceful means such as whipping. The status of women in Ethiopia is low. Women are discriminated against in all the spheres of life which include legal, social and economic institutions. The scholars' views are not true of all African women especially the Zimbabwean –Karanga women and the study of the Shona proverbs which is the focus of this study would have assisted them come up with a more comprehensive and realistic position of African women.

Wanyeki (op cit) further cites women in Rwanda, Cameroon, Senegal, Uganda and many other African states as marginalised, poor and vulnerable with no voice in public matters thereby having no decision making powers in bread and butter issues. Mayuri (2018) cites the plight of married women in Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo) who could not open their own bank accounts and needed their husbands' approval to do so. Women producers in Zaire work in fields fifteen to eighteen hours per day twice longer than those of their male counterparts. Women in Zaire have been relegated to the periphery by the laws there hence both men and women's attitude has hindered the advancement and improvement of the women of Zaire.

In the same situation are the women of Uganda who cannot access bank loans unless a male relation stands in as a guarantor (Wanyeki op cit). These scholars seem to agree that women are treated as perpetual minors in many African communities. However, Mayuri (ibid), Mannathoko in Meena (op cit) and Wanyeki (op cit) did not consider evidence and insights on the roles and place of women gained from Shona culture as reflected in proverbial sayings pertaining to women. This research study therefore unravels the correct perception of Karanga women through the study of Karanga proverbs which are living experiences of Shona people.

Though old, some of the above views are still shared by many people today and show a misconception of the tremendous value of women in traditional African culture. These views also misconstrue the contribution of women in most facets of life. A close examination of Shona proverbs on women will correct this. These shared views imply that the relegation of women to second class citizens is not indigenous to Africa but is a Western philosophy.

## **2.4 Zimbabwean perspectives**

The general consensus about Zimbabwean women by different scholars is that women were powerful decision makers and even held a higher status than that of men especially in the pre-colonial Zimbabwe in many instances. According to Ranger cited in Low and Tremayne (op

cit), rainmakers were both males and females with women being portrayed as the more powerful ones. In Mutoko, women dominated in rain and environmental shrines. The rain shrines in Matopos amongst the Ndebeles were controlled by the Ndebele women (priestesses) who did so with assistance of the priests' wives.

Parker (1974) in Pongweni (1989) states that proverbs express beliefs, values and knowledge of the user-community and the logical realisation that they serve to bind the past to the present and both to the future. As such, they simultaneously belong to each and every one. So there is no way we can divorce Shona proverbs from real life led by the Shona people in the past and even today. They should therefore be used to deduce the values and perspectives of the Shona people. Pongweni (ibid) further argues that proverbs derive from, and express, the communal view of the world based on first-hand experience. However, he does not go deeper to give examples of proverbs and how they apply in various people's lives, especially Karanga speaking women who are the focus of this research.

Mutswairo, Chiwome, Mberi, Masasire, and Furusa (1996) agree with Pongweni (ibid) that proverbs are generalisations of our lived experience, and further argue that proverbs reflect on people's culture and their way of thinking and guides them in their day today interpersonal relationships and inculcates the philosophy of Unhu/ ubuntu (humanness). They also promote an egalitarian society and unity regardless of economic status, for example, the proverb *Chara chimwe hachitswanyinda* (One thumb cannot crush a louse).

He further notes that some proverbs attempted to prevent conflict in society, discouraged extreme and excess power to individuals. He also cites examples of proverbs which define roles of various leaders in the community. Proverbs were also checks and balances of the power exercised by those in leadership. Proverbs according to Furusa in Mutswairo et al. (ibid), also gave the Shona people an identity, wean people from bitter experiences of the past

and give people hope in the future. Furusa in Mutswairo et al. (ibid) is generalising the functions of proverbs without specifically focusing on those proverbs pertaining women and how a study of such proverbs will help women realise their status in contemporary society.

From the views above, proverbs therefore should have a strong bearing on what happened and what happens in society and communities even today. The proverb *Musha mukadzi* (A wife is a pillar of a home) means that the woman plays a pivotal role in the home. Deke (2017:95) simply puts it, “The base of power structure in some African communities is in the custody of women.” Deke (ibid) further describes African women as custodians of traditions when men went to cities in search for work during colonial period leaving women in charge of all crucial roles that made up an African; ranging from worshippers to leaders. The so-called Shona culture concept which depicts a woman as someone who leans on the man as her pillar of support is therefore misplaced.

In Shona communities women are greatly respected and their responsibilities increase as they grow older hence the proverb, *Chembere ndeyembwa; yemunhu inofa ichigurukuta* (Mere old age belongs to a dog, when human the old die grumbling). In the families they are married into, older women teach the recently married women about the new family’s values and traditions. This assists the new wives to fit in the family and promotes the continuity of family values from one generation to another.

In traditional Shona culture, women are highly regarded. Most chiefdoms were established by both males and females. When one Shona ruling brother was challenged for his inconsistency, he confessed that he ruled, but his sister was the chief source of socio-economic and political ideas (Bourdillon, 1975). Bourdillon (ibid) and May (1983) cite many examples where women presided as chiefs and queens in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, hence having great authority and power in politics of the country. Proverbs like *Wazvare hadzi wazvare ndume* (When one has

given birth to a baby girl it is the same as giving birth to a baby boy) correctly shows equality between men and women. Cheater (1986) describes Shona women as having an upper hand in political issues of Shona communities than what people would want to admit.

According to Ranger cited in Low and Tremayne (op cit), Chief Makoni's latest move was to appoint women from each chiefly house in his area to preside over domestic cases as well as enforcing traditional laws such as banning of locust and caterpillar selling and the cutting down of groves in the area since 1998. The appointment of various women as chiefs in areas like Mutoko, Mashonaland , Lomagundi area, Penalonga-Mutare (with the famous Manyika queens) point to the authority wielded by women following their traditions (May op cit). The above scholars do agree that the status of women was high and their contribution would have carried more weight if they had also looked at the Shona proverbs that allude to the political power invested in Zimbabwean women of that time.

Bourdillon (op cit) further describes women as playing significant roles in influential rain shrines such as Matonjeni in Matopos where the priest and priestess (a brother and a sister who speak directly to the oracle) sit next to each other and are in charge at the cave and both intercede for their people to God. In Zimbabwe, the rain shrines were run by women- God's 'spirit wives' and this was changed by the coming of white colonialists to Zimbabwe who introduced scientific ways of bringing about rainfall such as cloud seeding which in turn shifted power away from the hands of rainmakers. Colonisation therefore transferred power and control to men through introduction of industries which are mainly dominated by men.

Deke (op cit) acknowledges the power of women and describes them as the 'ground' upon which the African traditional religion operates; therefore, women prescribe how power and authority have to be utilised, but they do so in a non-confrontational manner. Bourdillon (op cit: 50) correctly argues that "...it is a common misconception that women had little or no

status in traditional African societies.” He gives five (5) reasons responsible for this misconception which are; bride wealth, widow inheritance, representation by male relatives in traditional courts, women being subject to and ill treated by their husbands and women doing most of the work while men were idle. The proverb *Ziriwo rechembere ziramba waravira* (The unattractive relish of an old woman is refused only after tasting it) describes how people should not judge the women by their physical looks but by the power, intelligence and wisdom invested in them.

Deke (op cit) and Bourdillon (op cit) blame the money economy introduced by Western culture for the diminishing status of women. Their argument and observation is plausible. They both realise that Shona women have their own unique cultural experiences which are different from those of other women hence may be misconstrued by many. These experiences are embedded in the Shona proverbs on women. Coming from such a background, an analysis of the traditional Shona proverbs on women could have enriched Bourdillon’s (op cit) argument on the importance of women in Shona culture.

May (op cit) concurs with Rogers (op cit) and Bourdillon (op cit) and notes that Western researchers on African culture suffered two setbacks which are firstly; their informants were males who had their preconceived ideas about women and were divorced from reality. Secondly, their views were influenced by their cultural pre-conceptions. Thus, their views were not a correct representation of the real position of women in traditional Shona society. Smock (1977) quoted in May (op cit) also notes that traditional gender roles in Africa were altered by colonialism.

Despite increased women’s responsibilities caused by the movement of men to towns, women’s full rights remained embedded in the past, before the coming of Europeans (May op cit). Position of women deteriorated during the colonial period. According to Deke (op cit: 98),

“The influence of foreign religions and modernity posed a challenge on crucial roles played by women in African Traditional Religion.” Deke (op cit) further blames industrialisation, rapid economic development and combination of career and motherhood for the changing status of African women.

May (op cit) refers to the words of one speaker at a meeting of women who argued that African women can easily regain their status by simply going back to their tradition. Thus, Shona women are highly esteemed, as is shown by the study of Karanga proverbs on women. “Colonialism is the greatest onslaught on African societies...This led to economic marginalisation and cultural dislocation as well as the alienation of African minds,” (Hadebe in Vambe, 2001:3). May’s analysis of the situation of women is comprehensive in that she looks at different eras, namely pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods and their effects on women’s status and experiences. In addition to that, she correctly argues that women’s lost status can be regained by going back to traditional African culture which encompasses Shona proverbs on women which is the main thrust of this research study.

According to Hudson-Weems (1987), the African woman is a flexible role player hence can play several roles depending on the situation. She can be an aunt, a mother, a sister, a grandmother and can assume many other roles depending on the circumstances surrounding her. The African woman can easily adapt to different work environments and experiences. Cheater (1986) views Shona women as exercising authority in these roles as well as in other roles like ancestry and having special skills such as healing, midwifery as well as pottery. This flexibility and adaptability are prominent themes in traditional Shona proverbs on women.

The proverb, *Mai vemwana kufa pwere dzinorezvwa naani?* (If the mother dies who is going to entertain the children?) means that if children lose their mother who provides them with love, shelter and food, they are indeed to be pitied. They will have lost a mother, provider,

care-giver and entertainer. They would have lost the most important cog wheel in their lives. May (op cit) explains a woman's ability to provide for her family as an important duty and source of her status. This is a clear indication that women indeed are important flexible role players in society who will be missed if absent from home.

The sister of a chief (tete) in the Shona culture is the one responsible for distributing her late brother's property. She also arranges the succession of her brother and takes care of the rituals to be performed for her deceased brother (Gelfand, 1987). The aunt plays a pivotal role in the selection and inauguration of the new chief, is responsible for taking care of the late brother's property and settles any dispute that may arise within the chief's family.

An aunt in this position could be given a ward to run with her husband's assistance. Gelfand's (ibid) description of such a role is a clear indication of the social and political power invested in Shona women. In support of this, Deke (op cit) describes women in the African culture as leaders in religious festivals and ritual activities such as cooking and washing of utensils which people may trivialise while ignoring the importance attached to these rituals in the African traditional culture.

The duties performed by women require patience and tolerance. The proverb *Mukadzi muchero adimura anonhongawo* (A woman is like a fruit any passerby can pick) expresses how women should tolerate comments from various men; whether genuine or not, good or bad. The institution of motherhood/womanhood requires such qualities since the well-being of a child and the whole family is in their hands. A mother's heart should be able to forgive those who err and women are not expected to curse their children because a mother's curse is believed to be irreversible in African culture. *Mai musuva usingasehwi mumuto* (One's mother is a morsel which should not be dipped in gravy) is another proverb which depicts how sacred a mother/ woman should be treated. This is another basis of unquestionable sacred and



religious power bestowed upon African woman especially the Shona –Karanga women who are the focus of this study.

The bible which many in Africa believe was brought by the colonialists also regards women highly. Wisdom in Proverbs 1 verse 20-33 and Proverbs 8 verses 1-9 is referred to as ‘she.’ This is an indication that a woman has much to offer- endurance, wealth, prosperity and life. It is therefore the woman’s duties which make her play a pivotal role in any family. Thus instead of viewing women as second class citizens, women were and should actually be applauded for the roles they play in homes and the society at large. A study of the Karanga proverbs confirms the views above, despite the different cultural settings in which women find themselves. It is therefore the duty of every African woman to look back and see where the ‘rain started to beat them’ and correct misconceptions about them. The Karanga woman needs to rise, name and define herself since she has her own unique cultural experiences and should not be ‘*subalternised*’ (silenced).

The eighteen principles in the Africana Womanism approach propounded by Hudson- Weems (1987), can help Karanga women to re-define themselves and regain their original place and roles in society. The following words by Mberi, the Mbire spirit medium in Mutswairo et al. (op cit: 37) should be taken by today’s Karanga women as a platform through which they shall reclaim their original identity, “We are not that which is spoken about: faces that have no voices which need to be deciphered and explained by others. We are not images or mirages that neither need definition from outside nor are we objects that need to be defined by foreigners.” Therefore, women should speak for themselves and take the initiative to regain their lost status.

Amadiume (op cit) argues that some of the important achievements made by African women cannot be compared to those from other highly ranked Western countries who rate African

women as 'primitive.' He describes the African women as the chiefs, queens, empresses and pharaohs of the pre-colonial Africa who are capable of achieving even more and greater things today.

From the various views by different African scholars, it can be concluded that African culture especially the traditional Shona-Karanga culture respect and value women. This African worldview was misconstrued by colonialists as well as some western scholars. Most people have failed to recognise that the white settler is the one that has made most Africans inclusive of the Shona people reject their culture and accept the new affluence from the West (Morrish, 1972).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Most African women today have accepted the presumed low status accorded to them and wrongly blame it on African culture. This has given rise to feminist movements that attempt to liberate women and raise their status to that of their male counterparts. In order for African women to regain their lost status, they have to revisit their traditional culture and re-define themselves through the Africana Womanism ideology. A study of Karanga proverbs concerning women proves the high status accorded to women in Karanga communities. Therefore African women's real enemy is not African culture but Western values and thought patterns.

### **3 CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The thrust of this research is to rediscover traditional African culture in relation to the position of women as expressed in proverbs. It is a ‘pilgrimage’ to the original status accorded to women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, when the African women lived without much external influence. Ideas from Afrocentricity, Africana Womanism and Feminism will be discussed so as to place the study in its proper context.

#### **3.2 Afrocentricity**

The Afrocentric approach to African studies was propounded by Molef Kete Asante (Asante, 2009). The Afrocentric theory calls for Africans to place themselves at the centre of control of their life and destiny and stop looking at themselves from a Eurocentric view. It calls for Africans to define themselves rather than wait for the Europeans to do it for them. It also acknowledges that Africans had a history even before the coming of the whites. The theory should assist the African (Karanga) woman to define herself and understand her African culture from an African perspective. Using the Sankofan principle of Afrocentricity it is imperative for all Africans to go back to the past and use it today so as to rediscover themselves (Asante, *ibid*).

In this research Afrocentricity was used to investigate the original status and role of women through a close study of the Shona proverbs on women which reveals the original gender roles in traditional Shona societies. Proverbs like *Musha mukadzi* (A wife is a pillar of a home) reminds the African woman of her original role, status and responsibilities in the family. On the same note, Rodgers (1980) takes the home as a natural place for an African woman. Her biological make up prescribes upon her a specific set of tasks in the home, and these are considered universal.

The development of black studies in the 19th century came as a result of protest by African American students at San Francisco State College in the United States of America which led to the introduction of the first department offering a degree in Black Studies. This was necessitated by conspicuous lack of interest in and misrepresentation of African world views, thought patterns and injustices against black Africans. This led to the development of the Encyclopaedia of Black Studies which today has reduced to a greater extent Western imperialism in University curricula in Western countries. As a discipline, Black Studies sought to see a more equitable world and correct the perceived betrayal of Africans both in America and in the world. Through years of misrepresentation and Eurocentric approaches, the African people have been misconstrued and distanced from their true history (Asante and Mazama, 2005).

The purpose and aim of Afrocentricity then, is to bring back the African people to their true consciousness and understanding of the world around them, in the light of their experiences in history. Thus, through Afrocentricity, the African people seek to see the world through their own perspective and correct Eurocentric views held by both African and Western scholars.

According to Murove (2009), Westerners misunderstood Africa because of various reasons. Most of the African traditional practices embedded in their culture are difficult to access since they were transmitted orally. There are no written documents about African culture and this made it difficult for the whites to understand African culture. This is why scholars like Conrad in his book *Heart of Darkness* (1899), concluded that there was no history in Africa except that of the Europeans in the continent. These falsifications about Africans can best be corrected by the Africans themselves. Africans need to redefine themselves since they understand what they went through during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times.

Murove (ibid) further describes and blames some of the Westerners' policies, which included gender equity amongst them, which they peddled as if it was never there in Africa.

Chiwome (2002) in his analysis of several Shona novels about pre-colonial life in Africa came to the conclusion that most Shona artists during colonialism distorted the past such that most readers would not be proud to belong to it because of the ugliness portrayed in it. This 'ugly past' is also cited by Murove (ibid) when he described the Westerners as receiving second hand, distorted and limited information about Africa which created a negative picture about the African culture to the foreigners. Instead of relying on misinformed European views, Africans including the Karanga women can rename themselves and correct the misconceptions in the light of their own culture and experiences.

Kwame Nkrumah (cited in Asante and Mazama, 2005) with reference to Ghana, argues that Africans should see the world from the perspective of their own culture, not from the Western culture; a philosophy he calls consciencism (Asante and Mazama ibid:xxvii). This research study uses the same approach in examining the role and status of Karanga women as portrayed in Karanga proverbs which are drawn from Karanga culture. The discipline acknowledges the negative impact of European imperialism in Africa which also affected the status of women. Afrocentricity calls for the restoration of the African historical and cultural heritage. This is an indispensable pre-requisite to the realisation of African civilisation.

Afrocentricity maintains that the current position of accepting the European culture and civilisation as superior and universal has created confusion, however compelling the need for African people to rediscover their own culture and concepts that define them as a people. Feminism is one good example of Western ideologies that have caused much confusion among the African people. Thus the African experience is central to the African consciousness. The theory acknowledges the fact that the identity of Africans is based on the

continuity of African cultural history which is a real reflection of the experiences of the African people.

The knowledge gained from Afrocentric studies should empower the African people and the Shona Karanga women in particular, to change the status quo. This approach can also be called Africology, that is, “the study of African phenomenon from a stand point of African people,” (Asante and Mazama, *ibid*: 29).

### **3.2.1 Principles of Afrocentricity**

Afrocentricity as a discipline is guided by several principles. This research study focuses on centeredness and a sense of urgency on the part of African women as they are the key to this investigation.

#### **3.2.1.1 Centeredness**

According to Asante and Mazama (*ibid*), the principle of centeredness requires first and foremost taking Africa as the source and centre of African history, culture, values, norms and spiritual thinking. African ideas should be the centre or springboard from which any understanding and interpretation of African culture should start and be based on. Failure to do this results in misinterpretations. For example, the payment of *lobola* (bridewealth) was misunderstood by Western scholars and anthropologists as buying one’s wife which led to the denigration of women as objects in marriage and justified their oppression.

Bourdillon (1976) correctly notes the misconception that payment of bride wealth was a negative practice whereby women were bought and sold like chattels whereas in Karanga culture, bride wealth gives women value in their own eyes and in the eyes of men. It shows that the man paying it loves his wife and treats her with value, honour and dignity. High bride price expresses and enhances value which the husband attaches on the marriage. It is also a way of appreciating the in-laws for raising the bride. In this case marriage and *lobola*

payment are never in any way linked to business transactions and to treat them as such, is not only falling into the trap of colonialist views but to misrepresent truths about African women.

In her own family the bride price enables the woman's brother (s) to pay bride price for their wives, thus making it possible for the continuity of her own lineage and that of her new family. This gives the woman high status in Shona culture especially amongst her brothers' children who look up to her as the one whose marriage made it possible for them to exist. In her brothers' family, the aunt exercises great authority over the family for decision making and problem solving (Bourdillon, *ibid*: 50), hence the proverb *Vatete ndibabakadzi* (An aunt is a female father). In the light of this evidence it is clear that lobola empowers women.

Proverbs are part of African language and philosophy and therefore, they best describe the place of women in day to day Karanga discourse. Proverbs enunciate rules of conduct, for example, the proverb *Mukadzi womumwe ndiambuya* (someone's wife is your mother-in-law) governs how men in the public domain should treat other people's wives. They should be treated with utmost respect and dignity. The same proverb also prescribes how married women should carry themselves in public. As part of African philosophy, proverbs are the unwritten code of ethics of the Shona people. Where modern judges quote previous cases as precedence, in traditional Shona societies, they would quote proverbs (Mutswairo, Chiwome, Mberi, Masasire, and Furusa, 1996).

### **3.2.1.2 Sense of urgency**

As an aspect of Afrocentricity, urgency considers the need to redress the Eurocentric interpretation of African history as a matter long overdue. There is need to come up with a new understanding of African history and culture thereby coming up with new ideas and appreciation of the African experience. The reconstruction of the status and role of Karanga women is a step toward establishing the true consciousness of the Karanga women.

### **3.3 Other aspects of Afrocentricity**

The methodology of Afrocentricity involves getting an understanding of the claims of Western ideology and demystifying it. Once this is done, African scholars can go beyond this way of thinking and rediscover the African reality and way of thinking. (Asante and Mazama, op cit: 64). Such rediscovery involves a deconstruction of Eurocentricity and reconstruction of the real African history in relation to the position of women.

In Afrocentricity, land tenure is of paramount importance. Due to the egalitarian principle whereby everyone is equal, every member of society including women, is entitled to land; an important means of production and empowerment. At family level, the wife is allocated her own piece of land (*tseu*) on which she decides what crops to grow and over which she has total control. The produce and income realised from the sale of such produce forms part of her wealth (Rodgers, 1980, May, 1983). Upon her death, the woman's estate is fully controlled by her blood relatives. This shows that Karanga African culture accords women considerable honour and dignity.

Afrocentricity also examines African epistemology and axiology with a view to making a reconstruction of what constitutes knowledge and values for the African people. African philosophy refers to the African's desire for wisdom and knowledge as it pertains to the African peoples' lives and experiences. It involves an attempt by African people to systematically understand the world around them through the pursuit of true wisdom and knowledge and is expressed in myths, songs, way of thinking, speaking, proverbs et cetera. Therefore, this research study seeks to interrogate African philosophy about women as expressed in proverbs on women. African philosophy also examines gender roles in African communities. This research study also examines gender roles among the Karanga people.



### **3.4 Africana Womanism**

Africana womanism is an ideology developed by the African scholar Clenora Hudson-Weems in 1987. It considers African culture and Afrocentricity as pivotal to African women's liberation since it seeks to describe the African women from an African eye. Asante and Mazama (op cit) argue that a correct understanding of the relationship between men and women can be achieved by following this Afrocentric perspective. Central to this discussion will be the ideology of Africana womanism whose eighteen principles will assist the Karanga woman to regain her original status and place in society.

Africana womanism is a reaction to the failure by feminism to address the relationship between men and women in the African context. A true and correct understanding of the relationship between men and women requires a deep understanding of African culture and history of the African people. Without a deeper understanding of the African people and culture especially the Shona- Karanga women, one would be tempted to conclude that the African woman is oppressed.

Some African practices such as representation of women by men in traditional courts and widow inheritance are interpreted by Westerners as oppression of African women, (Bourdillon, 1976). Yet both practices are done for the purpose of protecting women. Widow inheritance allows for the continuity of the family since the widow would continue to bear children and bring up the children for the same family and under the same environment and tradition. It is also in the best interest of the woman to remain in the family rather than making new acquaintances. In both practices, the woman actually exercises the right to choose the one to represent her in traditional courts and the one to inherit her as a widow. There is therefore mutual understanding and consent on the part of the affected women. Taking such practices as forms of oppression is misplaced and is a misunderstanding of African culture.

The theory of Africana womanism seeks to explain the African woman's experiences and their expectations which are worlds apart with those of white women. It also seeks to focus on the African women's struggles and aspirations and seeks to differentiate itself from feminism. The present belief amongst most African women (Shona-Karanga included) is influenced by Fiorenza's feminist ideology that African women are oppressed and that feminism should result in a deliberate effort to liberate them. In the light of evidence, the researcher argues that it is not the traditional African culture that leads to the oppression and relegation of women but Western values and misconception of African values.

According to Hudson-Weems (op cit), feminism failed to address the situation of African women and provide ways for women to change the situation. As a European concept, feminism included European thought patterns and blamed African men for the predicament African women found themselves in. The purported subordination and relegation of women is more relevant to Western societies than it is for African communities. Oppression of women was brought about by Western culture and the money economy (Bourdillon, op cit). The introduction of the monetary economy empowered men more than women and actually robbed women of the power, authority and the high status accorded to them in the pre-colonial times.

Hudson –Weems (op cit) further notes that in its beginnings in the 1880's, feminism was racial and could not reflect the beliefs of African women. Throughout pre-colonial history, African women did not consider their men as their enemies but as their companions and compatriots, hence they struggled together. The two were complementary.

According to Hudson – Weems (op cit), men and women are in it together. Due to their shared history of white oppression, it would be detrimental for African men and women to divide themselves according to gender. She, however acknowledges the existence of

problems of relations between African men and women but blames them on the current racist and highly male dominated society both brought by Westerners. In addition, due to oppression experienced by African men in Western societies (even in African), the situation did not allow them to oppress African women to the same extent white men have oppressed white women. Due to both the inadequacy and inappropriateness of feminism to the African situation and experience, Hudson–Weems developed a more applicable theory she called Africana Womanism (Asante and Mazama op cit: 58).

### **3.4.1 Principles of Africana Womanism**

The theory according to Hudson – Weems (op cit) requires women to have freedom and power to name themselves. Thus the Africana woman is a self –namer which means she is able to give herself correct identity. She can best describe and name herself rather than wait for some outsider do it for her. The participants in this research should be able to identify themselves and articulate what the Karanga culture expects from Karanga women in terms of gender roles and status in society. They should be able to identify external influences that have negatively influenced their status and identity.

The other principle of Africana womanism is ‘self definer’. This means women should give themselves correct identity from their own point of view, even if the views go against the dominant culture. This means the Karanga women should have the ability to set goals consistent with Karanga culture. African women should be conscious of what it means to be an African woman, even if she lives in a Eurocentric set up. Thus, the African woman should not lose focus of her own understanding of what it means to be an African woman. The Shona-Karanga women should take the stance by Mambiri, ancestor of the Mbire people of Zimbabwe that Mbire people should speak for themselves. They are not faces without voices nor objects or images to be defined by foreigners (Mutswairo et al, op cit).

The Africana woman is also family centred. This means the African woman considers the family as an important institution to her and struggles to make the family functional. She puts the family first and works to make it successful. The African woman is not an individualist, but a team player who works for the success of the community. She is guided by the African principle of communalism whereby an individual is incomplete without others, “I am because we are: since we are therefore I am” (Mbiti op cit: 108-109). The family is considered incomplete, without the mother, that is, the woman. Even if the woman is gainfully employed, she still performs her functions in the home and her family remains an integral part of her life. However, Deke (2017) notes that the challenges of the twenty-first century African women now come from combining career and motherhood. This also poses a challenge on the women’s roles in African Indigenous Religion. This sometimes erodes the family cultural values and ethics.

The other aspects of family- centeredness are role flexibility and adaptability. Role flexibility means that an African woman can play several roles at the same time, for example, the same woman can play the role of an aunt, sister, grandmother and wife and many other roles depending on the situation surrounding her. She can work within and outside the home with or without man. Schmidt (1992) notes that when men left homes to go and work in white men’s mines and farms during colonialism in Zimbabwe, women were left alone to fend for the children in the rural areas. This means the women were left in charge and took care of the whole family assuming both men and women’s roles. However, the traditional system of aunties, grandmothers, step mothers et cetera has been weakened by colonisation, the money economy and cultural erosion in Africa. This has also negatively changed the power, authority and status of African women including the Karanga women.

Adaptability means that black women can adapt to different work environments, in different conditions. Despite the current perception that women are a weaker sex, African women can

work under difficult conditions and very often, the success of the family depends on the wife/mother hence the proverb *Musha mukadzi* (A woman is the pillar of every home). This means everything in the home revolves around the woman. Together with the African men, African women fought against Western oppression and consider their male counterparts as compatriots and not as enemies.

The other characteristic of the African woman is her strength and compatibility. This makes them the base of power structure in some African communities as Deke (ibid) states. He further notes that African gender relations bestow great power in women who became custodians of African traditions especially when African men moved to cities in search of employment. In the cities men lost their cultural values, in trying to impress their new masters, they became Christians and Moslems. Due to her experiences, the African woman has grown physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally strong, as opposed to common perception that women are weak and cannot take up difficult tasks. However, Bourdillon (1997:57) argues that women lost a greater part of their power when they later moved from traditional systems and adopted Western values.

A lot happened to the African Shona women during the colonial period. Their status and roles shifted tremendously because of various reasons which included urbanization, movement to cities, the money economy as well as the introduction of Christianity (Cheater, 1986). All this took toll on women in Africa inclusive of the Shona-Karanga women and subordinated women to their men. However, Albott (1974) cited in May (op cit) views this differently and notes that most women control family resources and make more decisions than their husbands who spend most of their time in the cities. He further observes that the wife became her husband's representative in the community and in turn, the husband depended on his wife for the sustenance of his membership in their community. Most homes in rural areas were and are still called after the woman, for example; *pamusha pamai nhingi*

(the home stead of the mother of so and so). This gave women more authority and high status than that of the husband in the family and community.

Africana womanism acknowledges the role of women as mothers and that of nurturing children. Bearing children is one of the most important roles of African women and is acknowledged as such by both men and women. The institution of motherhood is understood as a position of power in African societies with the mother's blood and breast milk (which directly binds the child to the mother) being acknowledged as sources of the mother's power and authority over her children (Deke, op cit).

Children are considered "the fruit of life" (Asante and Mazama op cit:65, Rodgers op cit) hence the Karanga proverb '*Unaki hwomukadzi huri pamwana* (the beauty of a woman is in child-bearing). Failure to bear children is considered a great curse for the affected woman who may make arrangements for her young sister or her brother's daughter to come and bear children for her. This is because the ability to bear children ensures the continuity of the family and posterity. The responsibility of nurturing children lies on women who readily perform it, ensuring that family and societal values are transmitted from one generation to the other. Thus the confinement of African women to the home, taken by feminists as an indicator of oppression of women is to the contrary a highly cherished and respected role that makes women important members of the family (especially Shona-Karanga families) and society (Rodgers op cit).

The other characteristic of the African woman according to Africana Womanism is spirituality, that is, belief in supernatural powers. Like their male counterparts, African women function as religious practitioners. This includes functions as traditional healers, rain makers and family, tribal and national spirit mediums. Deke (op cit) argues that the women's duties during religious ceremonies and rituals such as brewing of traditional beer, cooking,

washing and cleaning should not be trivialised since they have spiritual significance. Nehanda Nyakasikana is a well known national woman spirit medium who acted as a military and political advisor during the war of liberation in Zimbabwe. Mbiti (op cit) acknowledges the power of the Luvedu woman rain maker in South Africa who ensured the nourishment of her people through asking for rain and stopping excess rain. She could use her rain making powers to punish enemies by causing famine in nearby territories by withholding rain thereby exercising power and influence even in these territories.

The African woman believes in the welfare and well-being of other women. They sympathise and empathise with fellow African women. In Africana womanism, this is called genuine sisterhood. In polygamous families, the first wife has the duty of inducting and making sure that the younger wives are taught customs of the new family (May: op cit). Thus African women are custodians of African culture and perpetuate it through the family and community. The Africana woman seeks to do this without external influence and force. This ensures the security and preservation of African culture. They preach the gospel of genuine sisterhood within Africa and beyond.

### **3.5 Feminism**

Meena (1992: 2) defines feminism as, “The recognition of the systematic discrimination against women on the grounds of gender and commitment to work towards change.” Movements, including feminism whose aims have been to liberate women from oppression by their male counterparts have emerged in the world as a whole and in Africa in particular. From antiquity, women have been perceived as oppressed by men. This oppression, particularly in patriarchal societies took different forms in different cultures and was justified by different reasons ranging from biological, physiological, psychological, cultural and social factors. Feminism took centre stage in gender studies and is of great significance to this research study. Two schools of thought emerge. One argues that feminism, despite its

Western origins, is relevant in Africa and can liberate African women from the perceived oppression by their male counterparts. The other school of thought argues that feminism is a foreign ideology with no relevance to gender relations in Africa.

Researchers, scholars and writers have written extensively on gender relations resulting in the development of the discipline of gender studies now very popular in Universities and colleges of education especially in Zimbabwe. Meena (ibid: 1) defines gender as, “socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men play in their daily lives.” Thus from the definitions of gender and feminism above, discrimination of women and prescription of roles to men and women is a social reality. What differ are the extent, form, and gender roles from culture to culture.

Many scholars in African studies argue that feminism is a foreign ideology with no relevance in the African setting (Meena, ibid). Reddock (1991) cited in (Meena, ibid: 1) argues that feminism is an ideology of the upper class strata of society. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007:3), “Feminists have contributed immensely towards overcoming widespread gender stereotypes and improving women’s rights and equality across the globe... and should not be taken for granted.” Hesse-Biber and Leavy (ibid) further note that feminism is all about women’s everyday experiences.

Feminists blame African culture for the predicament African women find themselves in. However, according to the arguments from Afrocentricity, African worldview and African womanism, the real culprit is not African culture, but the introduction of Western culture amongst the African people. Feminists also universalised problems and experiences of white women to those of African women. This led to the misinterpretation of African culture resulting in blaming men for the perceived oppression of women. The African woman does not look at a man as a rival but as a compatriot and companion. The Western women’s



experiences cannot be equated to that of the African women since their experiences are not the same. The African woman has to describe her own experiences.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

From the discussion of Afrocentricity, Africana womanism, and feminism, this chapter has shown that the problem of the oppression of women by men is not limited to Zimbabwe or Africa but is experienced in the world as a whole. It is not the intention of this research to deny that Karanga women have experienced oppression in the past and could be experiencing it today. Ideas from Afrocentricity and Africana womanism have shown that the problem of the oppression of women should not be blamed on African culture. It has been shown that African culture gave women high status as opposed to western culture. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, the Karanga women of central Zimbabwe enjoyed a great deal of respect, honour and dignity. This state of affairs changed drastically with the coming of colonialism, Western values and the money economy. The true emancipation of women therefore is through the reconstruction of African values.

## **4 CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines methodology and research design which was used for this research. It presents data collection methods namely interviews, document analysis, observation and questionnaires. It also discusses the participants and methods of data analysis that are both qualitative and quantitative.

### **4.2 Research design**

The term research design has been defined by various authors in various ways. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:63) define a research design as the planning of research programme from the beginning to the end and is a guide in gathering, examining and analysing observed facts. According to Mouton (1996:107), a research design “...is a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing the research problem.” This set of guiding principles and directions assist the researcher to achieve the objective he or she has set for him or herself. Punch (2014:114) concurs with Mouton (ibid) and Bless and Higson-Smith (ibid) and defines a research design as simply “...a basic plan for a piece of research.” The major purpose of a research design is to increase validity of the immediate results through the predictions made about the research result. Simply put, a research design is a researcher’s plan which maps the way the research will follow.

According to Punch (ibid), the research design encompasses four major ideas. The first one is the ‘strategy.’ This refers to the road map designed by the researcher which assists him or her to answer research questions. The strategy determines the approach the researcher takes; whether it is going to be qualitative or quantitative. In most cases, the nature of data to be collected determines whether one uses the qualitative or quantitative approach. However, an adoption and use of both makes the research more credible and valid. In this research, a

qualitative approach was largely used because most of the information required explanation, analysis and description. The quantitative approach was made use of to complement attainment of research data for this study. The table below summarises the strategies for the quantitative and qualitative paradigms.

**Table 1: Showing strategies for the quantitative and qualitative paradigms.**

QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
-A case study	-experimental
-ethnography	-quasi experimental
-grounded theory	-non- experimental
-action research (or combination of any of the above)	
-non interventionist	-varies from interventionist to non-interventionist

**Adapted from Punch (2014:114)**

The second idea is ‘conceptual framework’ which refers to the conceptual status of things being studied and their relationship to each other. In conceptual framework, sampling for the research is biased towards quantitative studies. The third idea is the question of ‘who or what’ will be studied. The fourth idea concerns ‘the tools and procedures’ to be used when collecting and analysing empirical data.

Punch (ibid) says the four ideas, position the researcher in real life situations and further notes that the need to place the researcher in the empirical world is of paramount importance in modern-day educational research. A research design therefore comes first before the real research process takes place and as a result it can be taken as a road map, a proposal or a draft of a research study. A design connects the research questions with the research data. It also describes the instruments and system that is used to respond to the research questions. In other words, without a Research Design, there is no research to talk about. The Research Design is therefore the basis of all research and the more viable it is the better the data it produces.

#### **4.3 Mixed research design**

Mixed research design can be defined as descriptive statistics combined with qualitative results presented jointly and create a crossbreed piece of work (Biklen, 1992). The underlying fundamental principle behind mixed methods research is that a topic is more understood when there is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research strengths which will result in the weaknesses of both approaches being compensated for (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie ,2004 cited in Punch, ibid:303). The loopholes of each method are covered up by the strengths of another method thus producing a more objective research. In this research, a mixed approach was used so as to give weight to the findings of the research.

Qualitative research on one hand deals with human behaviours, stories, general human lives and human experiences and enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. This approach has been described by Woolfson (2011) as data obtained from interviews, observations as well as information from examining documents. Qualitative research design is also descriptive, thus information gathered is in form of expressions, pictures, photographs, interview scripts, video tapes, field notes or memos rather

than being numerical. Citations from the data need to be written down so as to authenticate data presentation. In line with the above argument the researcher recorded proceedings, took relevant photographs and made some field notes.

The researcher looked at everything in a critical way; thus all gestures, jokes, conversations, wall decorations, special words uttered and participants' responses were important since they assisted the researcher understand more and have a deeper understanding of phenomenon under study. These and other relevant aspects were closely examined so that the researcher could obtain a fuller description of the participants' behaviours, actions, and attitudes which assisted her to draw conclusions on the status of the women under study. This was arrived at from an informed decision.

On the other hand, quantitative research heavily relies on the gathering of numeric data and it focuses on hypotheses testing and theory testing (Woolfson *ibid*: 33). It also gives numerical outcomes which are represented by figures. According to Chiromo (2009), quantitative research design tries to find out and establish correlations and describes the basis in measured social reality. Quantitative research approach aims at collecting numeric data from a huge number of participants. Quantitative research approach investigates trends, compares and contrasts, and tries to relate variables using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014:27). It also interprets results through comparing them with predictions made before the research and the findings made in researches done in the past. In quantitative research approach, researchers attempt to be objective hence they should be detached, neutral and unbiased. Researchers in quantitative methods focus their attention on the phenomena of investigation and attempt to learn more about the phenomena from a distance. The researchers assume that there is something truthful, a phenomenon in existence which when studied by any rationale observers would agree on its reality and characteristics (Woolfson: *ibid*). However, digits

alone could not give us full information of the research so they were supported by further explanations and descriptions through use of the qualitative approach. Gathered statistical data became clearer when further explained so one needs to realise that at times, figures alone are like a silent witness.

The two approaches were combined in such a manner that the result was complementary; strengths and advantages with non - overlapping weaknesses and disadvantages. The table below shows the strengths of the two approaches:

**Table 2: Showing strengths/merits of qualitative and quantitative methods**

QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
-brings strengths of sensitivity to context and meaning.	-bring the strengths of conceptualising variables
-local groundedness	-profiling dimensions
-in-depth study of smaller samples	-formalising comparisons using large and representative samples
-great methodological flexibility which enhances the ability to study process and change.	- tracing trends and relationships

**Adapted from Punch (2014:304)**

Each paradigm can be strong in the areas where the other is not. Punch (ibid) notes that the two research approaches strengths compensate each other's weaknesses. This has been taken

as the major and reasonable logic behind its rationale. Given such a scenario, one can certainly deduce that a research will be incomplete where a researcher sticks to one of these methods and ignores the other.

According to Woolfson (ibid), mixed research method improves the quality of research and reduces bias. Since every approach has strengths and weaknesses, by employing different research methods, the researcher minimises the chances of making mistakes and omitting important aspects of the research. Denscombe (2008:133) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) outlines four advantages of using mixed methods which are stated below:

- (i) there is increase in data accuracy.
- (ii) they provide an absolute and total picture of the phenomenon being studied thereby minimising bias and weaknesses that emerge from the use of a single method of research,
- (iii) they enable the researcher to develop analysis and build on the original data.
- (iv) they aid sampling.

It has also been argued that quantitative and qualitative research methods have similarities. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:42) cited in Punch (op cit), data from the two research approaches can be useful for describing findings. The data can also be used for investigating, verifying and examining phenomena and good for opening up ideas. Mixed methods researchers do not have to label the uses of the two approaches and restrict or limit their thinking to particular purposes since both can be used for a variety of purposes.

Punch (op cit) notes that the main purpose of quantitative methods is theory testing and exploring an area for producing hypothesis and theory. In the same manner qualitative research methods can also be used for theories and hypotheses testing even though it is generally used for generating theory. The world is viewed as mixed hence relying exclusively on either qualitative or quantitative approaches, only gives a partial understanding of the

phenomenon under study. A quantitative approach provides statistics whilst the qualitative one provides clarity through interpreting the figures. As already alluded to, this research embraced both approaches to ensure that it came up with sound findings.

Mixed methods approach goes beyond just the confirmatory and exploratory research and beyond the induction and deduction in answering research questions. It was also assumed that the use of various methods gave assurance that shortcomings of the employed approaches were catered for and that the methods complemented each other. Each compensated for the limitations of the other and one method was a follow up of the other. Different types of data collection methods collected a different type of data specific to it and when put together improved reliability and validity of research findings. This research adopted both methods for the reasons noted above.

For this research, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were employed so as to get detailed information in relation to the research topic and ascertain the real status accorded to Karanga women of Zaka District in relation to Shona proverbs. A better insight was gained which also enriched the research findings and gave a better understanding of Karanga women way of life and status in the society.

#### **4.3.1 Mixed methods designs**

There are many types of mixed methods designs, but there are four major ones namely Triangulation, Embedded, Exploratory and Explanatory research designs as have been cited by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:58-88) in Punch (op cit:309-311). The researcher dwelt on two mixed research designs for this research study and these are triangulation and exploratory research designs. This was because they suited the nature of this study.



#### **4.3.1.1 Triangulation**

Triangulation is a research method employed by most researchers in social sciences today which uses two or more research designs running concurrently. This is done so as to avoid compromising the quality of data from the same topic, and reduce faults as well as strengthen research findings. Although some people would term it 'latest,' some researchers like Cohen et al. (op cit) do not take triangulation as a new paradigm. According to Cohen et al. (op cit: 26), triangulation has been in use for many years and therefore cannot be termed a latest approach. Since time immemorial, researchers used various methods at different or same stages of a single research study hence the approach needs not be treated with the novelty which most researchers and scholars would want to claim for it. The researcher used the approach since it has been proved reliable and viable.

Various definitions of this paradigm by different scholars have also come up. According to Mouton (op cit: 156), triangulation can be defined as "...the use of a variety of methods and techniques of data collection in a single study." Some definitions backdate as far as the twentieth century with scholars like Denzin (1978) cited in Mouton (op cit) defining triangulation as the use multiple methods of data collection. Campbell and Friske (1959) coined the term 'Multiple operationism' to refer to triangulation. Recent scholars like Cohen et al. (op cit: 195) also define triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour. Johnson and Christensen (2012:33) describe triangulation as a mixed research approach which involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, approaches or paradigm characteristics. Thus triangulation is also called mixed methods approach or 'multi-method approach.' Different methods were used simultaneously to gather data which shaded light on misconceptions on the place and status of Karanga women in Shona societies of Zaka District in Zimbabwe.

Johnson and Christensen (ibid: 50) further note that if the researcher over relies on one method of investigating a phenomenon, information obtained may be distorted and biased. The picture reflected may not be the reality of the phenomenon under investigation. It therefore, becomes easier for one to arrive at incomplete and misinformed decisions and conclusions. Thus, according to Patton (2015:661), triangulation provides various ways of looking at an event or phenomenon and adds credibility by strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn. The use of triangulation increases the validity and reliability of research results. Therefore, the researcher used this approach so as to ensure consistency of evidence and information collected.

Conclusively triangulation is a single phase design which involves collection of different types of data at the same time which are then put together at the end or stage when results are being interpreted. In the same way, data collected from interviews, questionnaires, observations and group discussions was combined so as to validate findings.

#### **4.3.1.2 Exploratory design**

Exploratory design has two phases; the first one being the collection of qualitative data and then the collection of quantitative data. The assumption is that qualitative methods give the basis and a better understanding of an investigation before quantitative methods are employed, (Punch ibid). In this research, various issues relating to the place and status of Karanga women were therefore explored.

#### **4.4 Data collection methods**

There are many ways of collecting data. This research study focused on interviews, questionnaires, observation and group discussions. The use of multiple data sources ensures reliability.

#### **4.4.1 Interviews**

Kvale (1996:14) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:349) defines an interview as an exchange of views between two or more people on an area of mutual interest, sees human interaction as vital for construction of knowledge, and emphasizes the situatedness of research data. Biklen (1992) simply defines an interview as a purposeful conversation. This method of data collection has been described by many researchers as the best way of understanding people's thoughts. It has been also one of the major methods of data collection especially in qualitative research. Interviews can easily work together with other sources of data collection such as observation, questionnaires or any other method.

Interviews have been described by Punch (2014) and Punch (2009) as the most outstanding way of accessing the human mind, getting to understand the way people view things and interpretations made on what they see, people's insights and how they define phenomena. It is also taken as a powerful way of studying other people. Explaining about interviews Punch (2009) and Punch (2014) quote Jones (1985:46) who describes interviews as the best way of understanding other people's constructions of reality through asking them questions in a way that makes them express themselves freely and in their own way. They allow the researcher to gather as much information as possible by taking note of non-verbal forms of communication like nodding, smiling and frowning among others. This is so because interviews are flexible and can be adjusted so as to suit a wide range of research situations. The researcher visited and interviewed the elderly who are above sixty-five years of age under the four chiefs of Zaka District so as to get their insights on the place and roles of Shona-Karanga women.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Patton (2002) cited in Punch (2014) also distinguishes three types of interviews namely the informal conversational, the

general interview guide approach and the standardised open-ended interview. An interview can be a short conversation even over the telephone or it can be a lengthy session and in some cases can stretch even for days depending on issues on research. According to Frey (1993) cited in Punch (2014), different types of interviews can be used in diverse situations. There are procedures which researchers have to follow when conducting an interview according to Kvale (1996:88) cited in Cohen et al. (2011:415). These stages are: (1) Thematising which means making decisions on the purpose of the research study. (2) Designing which involves interpreting the research objectives clear enough to reflect what the researcher wants to find out. (3) Interviewing. (4) Transcribing. (5) Analysing. (6) Verifying. (7) Reporting. For this research study the researcher used unstructured interview. This type of interview allows flexibility hence more data was gathered from the informants.

#### **4.4.1.1 Unstructured interview**

Unstructured interviews are sometimes called ethnographic interviews and are usually non-standard and open-ended. Bless and Higson-Smith (op cit:106) define an unstructured interview as a method of getting people convey their views widely on a certain topic which consists of asking respondents to comment on broadly defined issues. This type of interview is used to understand the way people behave and to explore how they interpret meanings of what happens around them and their state of affairs and their cultural significance. Participants are free to expand their experiences. The researcher used the same approach because it suited this research study which aimed to understand the cultural perceptions of the Karanga women of Zaka district.

Fontana and Fey (1994) cited in Punch (2014) outline some aspects to be considered by researchers when they plan to collect data using unstructured interview. These aspects are as follows:

- (i) Accessing the setting
- (ii) Understanding the language and the culture of the participants
- (iii) Researchers to decide on how to present themselves
- (iv) Establishing where to find informants
- (v) Achieving trust and confidence
- (vi) Creating good relationship
- (vii) Collecting the empirical materials

The researcher may use the same questions as in structured interviews but rather in a free environment and not a rigid one as is in the structured one. The questions can be altered to suit the way participants are responding. The researcher may also chip in with own opinions or ideas so as to encourage participants to say more (Chiromo, op cit). Unstructured interviews are fascinating but also require the researcher to have good questioning skills. Follow up questions are necessary where the informant provides incomplete or vague answers. For this research study the researcher visited the interviewees' places so as to create a gratis environment where participants were able to express their views freely and openly in the comfort of their own homes.

#### **4.4.1.2 Group interviews**

Group interviews also known as focus groups, are now popularly used and they contribute immensely in social science research studies. According to Punch (2014), group interview demands that the researcher interviews a number of participants concurrently rather than working with just one participant. This gives participants a leeway to share their views and might even generate new ideas in each other. According to Cohen et al. (2011:432), group interviews save time because they are faster as compared to person to person interviews. They also bring people together. The researcher also did group interviews for the reasons

stated above. Group interviews can also take different forms, thus, they can be unstructured, semi-structured or structured.

The researcher is the key figure during the interview, playing several roles which include facilitating, assisting, moderating, guiding and documenting group interaction. According to Fontana and Fey (1994) cited in Punch (2014), the researcher provides the research questions on the topic under discussion and the researcher directs the interaction of the group. If well coordinated, group interviews can unravel hidden truths about some phenomena under study. The researcher has to strive to maintain balance during group interaction. The researcher facilitated and managed the group interviews well and was able to collect considerable information on the topic under discussion.

Group interviews create a free environment which excites participants to give their views, insights, intentions, and their motives openly. As a result group interviews have become one of the most striking data collection alternative to discover more on individuals' behaviour although there is a possibility that some respondents maybe influenced by others. They are also less expensive, data loaded, flexible, exciting, collective, detailed and recall-aiding. For this reason the researcher found a group interview one of the best instruments to collect information on the status accorded to the Karanga women Zaka district.

The group interviews were carried out with men and women of various age groups ranging from eighteen to sixty-five years of age as was identified in the sample. This provided deeper insights and perceptions into the topic under study since different age groups were given a platform to air and share their views. The young generation, the middle-aged and the old were all represented and they aired their views whilst the researcher guided the discussions.

#### **4.4.2 Questionnaires**

Most researchers are fond of using questionnaires as methods of collecting data. It is mainly because they are easy and simple to prepare. Researchers are cognisant of the need to carefully plan questionnaires so that they yield desirable results. Chiromo (op cit: 24) defines a questionnaire as a form of enquiry, which includes a systematically compiled and structured series of questions that are forwarded to population samples. Wilson and McLean (1994) in Cohen et al. (2011) explain questionnaires as useful data collecting instruments which are easy to analyse. They also argue that questionnaires provide structured and numerical data often answered in the absence of the researcher. Like interviews questionnaires can be structured or unstructured.

The downside of questionnaires is that usually response rate in most cases is low. It is because some respondents may lack interest and may not fill in the questionnaires. Others may misplace the questionnaires and fail to return them to the researcher. Questionnaires are prone to abuse. Some participants are illiterate and may have some people responding incorrectly or incompletely fill in for them. This may undermine the quality of information collected from participants.

To avoid some of those limitations researchers need to keep their questions short and well-formulated so as to make them straightforward and simple to complete. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (op cit), a questionnaire should never be too long that respondents refuse to cooperate. The two go on to explain that questions should not be double-barrelled and leading but rather be simple and short, unambiguous and understandable. Despite these weaknesses, questionnaires were used and measures were put in place to minimise their flaws. There were some minor hiccups (which included incomplete responses and some few

questionnaires not returned) but generally the information gathered was quite handy for this research study.

Respondents' consent is needed first as well as the assurance that they can withdraw at any stage or may leave some items incomplete on the questionnaire. They also need to be assured that there is no harm for them to participate in the research and be shown that there is also potential for them to get assistance to improve their condition if need be (Punch 2014). In this case, the researcher emphasised and assured participants that the data collected was to be treated confidentially and that it was primarily and purely for research purposes.

#### **4.4.3 Observations**

An observation is a direct way of learning people's actual behaviours which has been taken as a tradition in social sciences. Marshall and Rossman (1995); Simpson and Tuson (2003:2) cited in Cohen et al. (2011) define observation as looking and noting systematically people, events, behaviours, settings, artefacts, routines, and so on. In questionnaires as well as interviews participants might only respond in a manner they think would impress the researcher but different from their real behaviours, of which observations offer the researcher "an opportunity to gather 'live' data from naturally occurring social situations" (Cohen et al. 2011:456).

The researcher can watch directly what will be happening rather than relying on information collected from participants indirectly. This makes data from observations more reliable and valid as compared to other methods of data collection where researchers have to infer information. Observations can be taken as improved way of collecting data in modern research studies techniques. Chiromo (op cit) gives three major types of observations namely complete participant, participant and complete observer. On the other hand, Punch



(2014:153), groups them into two: structured and unstructured observations with quantitative approaches highly structured and qualitative approaches to observation being unstructured.

According to Cohen et al. (2007), observations can focus on behaviours or qualities such as sociability, hostility, friendliness, sociable and unsociable behaviours etcetera. For this research study the researcher directly observed women of Zaka District as they carried out their chores at various functions and observed how they related and interacted with men in order to gain insights on the place and roles accorded to them then tabulated the data collected.

#### **4.4.4 Document Analysis**

Different organisations keep important records or documents which contain their history. Documentary information can be in form of words, pictures (visual evidence) or auditory. According to Martens (2005:389), researchers turn to records and documents so as to acquire required background information of a phenomenon under study. According to Punch (2014), it is quite unfortunate that most researchers do not take heed of them. They ignore documentary data and maybe this is because researchers concentrate on methods which they regard as modern and latest such as interviews, observations, surveys and many others.

Documentary data can be triangulated and be used in conjunction with interviews and observations in a single research study (Denzin, 1989 cited in Punch, 2014). This type of information can be found in organisations, companies and government departments. The researcher visited Zaka district offices to acquire information on the livelihoods and population of Zaka area.

#### **4.5 Research site and participants**

Zaka district is found in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. It is situated approximately eighty six kilometres to the south east of the city of Masvingo. Other surrounding districts include

Bikita to the east, Chiredzi to the south and Chivi to the west. The communal area has several villages which fall under four major traditional chiefs namely Nyakunhuwa, Bota, Ndanga and Nhema. The district is a low-lying area which has poor sandy soils. Most people in the district survive on subsistence farming. Some of the crops grown in this fairly populated area include maize, sorghum, groundnuts, cotton and pumpkins.

According to UNICEF (2012), the census results show that Zaka district has a population of approximately 181 301 people with a population density of roughly sixty-five people per square kilometre. The researcher collected information from men and women of various statuses. Information was collected from a sample of literate, illiterate, working and non-working class men and women of the area. She also gathered data from women across all social strata that is, single, widowed and married women of all age groups starting from the age of eighteen upwards. The researcher used the sampling system to do so.

#### **4.5.1 Sampling**

Mouton (op cit) says that a sample should be as representative as possible of the target population. Creswell (op cit: 60) defines a population as a group of people with the same characteristics. The target population is derived from the entire population. A target population is a group of individuals with some common defining characteristics that the researcher can identify and study. In this research, the population is the men and women of Masvingo province and the target population refers to the men and women of Zaka district. Within this target population the researcher selected the sample of men and women for the study.

There are two main methods of sampling namely probability and non-probability sampling. Cohen et al. (2011) explain probability sampling as drawing unsystematically from a wider population which will be able to make generalisations because it seeks representativeness of

the wider population. They go on to explain that in non- probability sample the researcher targets a certain group knowing well that it will not represent a wider population but only itself. For this research, random stratified sampling which is a probability sampling strategy was used.

According to Chiromo (op cit), random stratified sampling requires the researcher to group the population into sub-groups of similar characteristics. It begins by identifying the characteristics of the wider population. These are then included in the sample (Cohen et al. 2011:154). The researcher unsystematically sample within these strata so that groups represent the identified characteristics. This implies that the sample becomes larger in order to accommodate the various characteristics. This strategy combines random sampling and classification and promotes triangulation; which is a mixed research design. Thus both quantitative and qualitative designs are combined.

For this research, the researcher identified the following characteristics in the wider population of men and women; youths, married, single, working class, unemployed, modern and traditional then randomly selected ten participants of both sexes from each category to give a total sample of seventy participants from randomly selected villages under each chief. This was done in order to establish relationships between women's perceptions of themselves men's perceptions of women and these variables.

#### **4.6 Methods of data analysis**

Information generated through mixed methods research design was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was interpreted numerically through tables, graphs, pie charts and other quantitative data presentation methods. Important recurrent themes from qualitative methods of data collection used were presented and interpreted in form of texts

through descriptions. Data from quantitative and qualitative methods was presented simultaneously and analysed concurrently through deductive and inductive methods.

#### **4.7 Ethical consideration**

According to Chiromo (op cit), ethical principles are the right and wrong or the dos and don'ts that are expected to guide the researcher when undertaking his or her research study. The researcher has to be aware of the need to uphold ethical standards when conducting research studies and should obtain consent from the research participants. The participants should be empowered first with clear information about the nature, the purpose of the study, as well as possible risks and benefits. They should also be aware of the procedures of the research process. The researcher had the mandate to explain to them why she chose the particular respondents to participate in her research study. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed that they may withdraw even if they had earlier indicated willingness to participate.

The researcher also assured participants that participation remained confidential and research findings would be used for the purposes of this research only and not exposed to anyone who has nothing to do with this research study. If participants seem unwilling to respond to some questions they must not be coerced in any way since this would be considered as encroachment into someone's private life. The researcher made sure that participants' privacy was not encroached into. In some instances, some questions were rephrased in order to suit the local culture and traditions.

Participants also need not be deceived by researchers. Researchers need to protect their participants from any form of harm be it physical or psychological. In fact all forms of harm whether spiritual, emotional, social, et cetera should be avoided. The research was therefore carried out in utmost good faith.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology. The researcher combined quantitative and qualitative research paradigms and argued that the mixed research design led to a better and richer understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The research methods namely interview, observation, questionnaire and document analysis were discussed in relation to the research topic. Random stratified method of sampling was chosen for this research and justified.

## 5 CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis, interpretation and discussion of research findings. The interrelations between the research objectives, literature review and the research findings are analysed and discussed. Above all the researcher discussed the Shona proverbs concerning women that come from participants and augment them with Shona proverbs on women from other sources. Problems faced by women in executing their roles in the Shona culture and suggestions as well as solutions provided by respondents to overcome the problems are also discussed.

### 5.2 Response Rate

In this research study, the researcher achieved a response rate of seventy five percent (75%) (n=210) instead of the anticipated hundred percent turnover (100% n=280) which can be categorized as a high response rate. A higher response rate minimizes the risk of response bias and it increases the validity and reliability of the research results. The table below shows the response rate that was achieved per instrument.

**Table 3: Response rate**

RESPONSE RATE FOR PARTICIPANTS						
Chiefs	Group Discussions		Questionnaires		Interview	
Chief A	12 out of 14	85,7%	40 out of 50	80%	5 out of 6	83%
Chief B	11 out of 14	78,6%	35 out of 50	70%	4 out of 6	67%
Chief C	11 out of 14	78,6%	42 out of 50	84%	3 out of 6	50%
Chief D	10 out of 14	71,4%	32 out of 50	64%	5 out of 6	83%
Actual	44	78,6%	149	74,5%	17	70,8%
Possible	56	100%	200	100%	24	100%

**Source: Research data 2019**

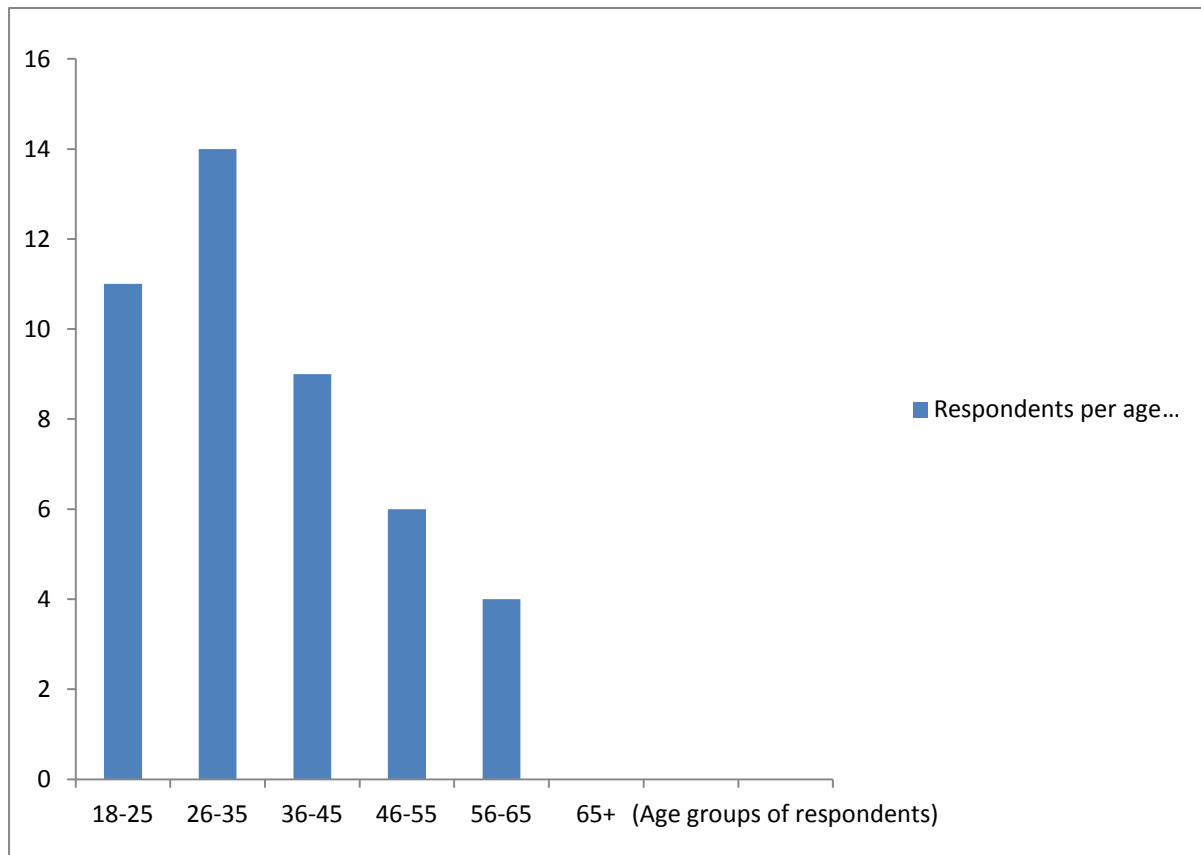
The researcher failed to achieve a hundred percent response rate because of various reasons. Twenty five comma five percent 25, 5% (n=51) of the questionnaires were not returned while others were incomplete. Twenty two comma four percent (22, 4%)(n=12) of the participants did not turn up for group discussions and did not excuse themselves whilst others turned up and left before the end of the discussions. Despite having made appointments with interviewees, twenty nine comma two percent (29, 2% n=7) of some of them were not present at their homes on the scheduled days. It is quite clear that they had other commitments but this did not water down the authenticity of the research since the response rate was high.

### **5.3 Focus group discussions**

The focus group discussions were carried out with participants from each of the four chiefs of Zaka District namely Ndanga, Nyakunhuwa, Nhema and Bota. The researcher targeted fourteen participants (14) randomly selected from different villages under each of the four chiefs. Seventy-four percent (74%) (n=44) of the participants turned up for the group discussions. The focus groups comprised of women and a few men (eleven out of a total of forty four participants were men) of ages ranging from eighteen years to sixty-five year. Men had to be present not only for gender balance but also to move towards objectivity. Age groups ranged from teenagers to sixty-five so as to obtain a balanced view of respondents' perceptions on the topic under review. The data obtained is therefore, valid, reliable and tolerable because the respondents were above fifty percent. According to Barker (2012), response rate below fifty percent is intolerable as it represents the minority of the research population.

Women participants who constituted seventy five percent of the participants (75%) (n=33) dominated the discussions since they were the focus of this research study. The researcher could not ignore the input of men since they would also give their views on women's roles. Men were considered in this research to attain gender balance. The researcher therefore,

deliberately included a lesser number of men (25%, n=11) in the focus group discussions so as to have their input. The bar graph below shows age groups of respondents.



**Figure 1: Age groups of respondents**

**Source: Research data 2019**

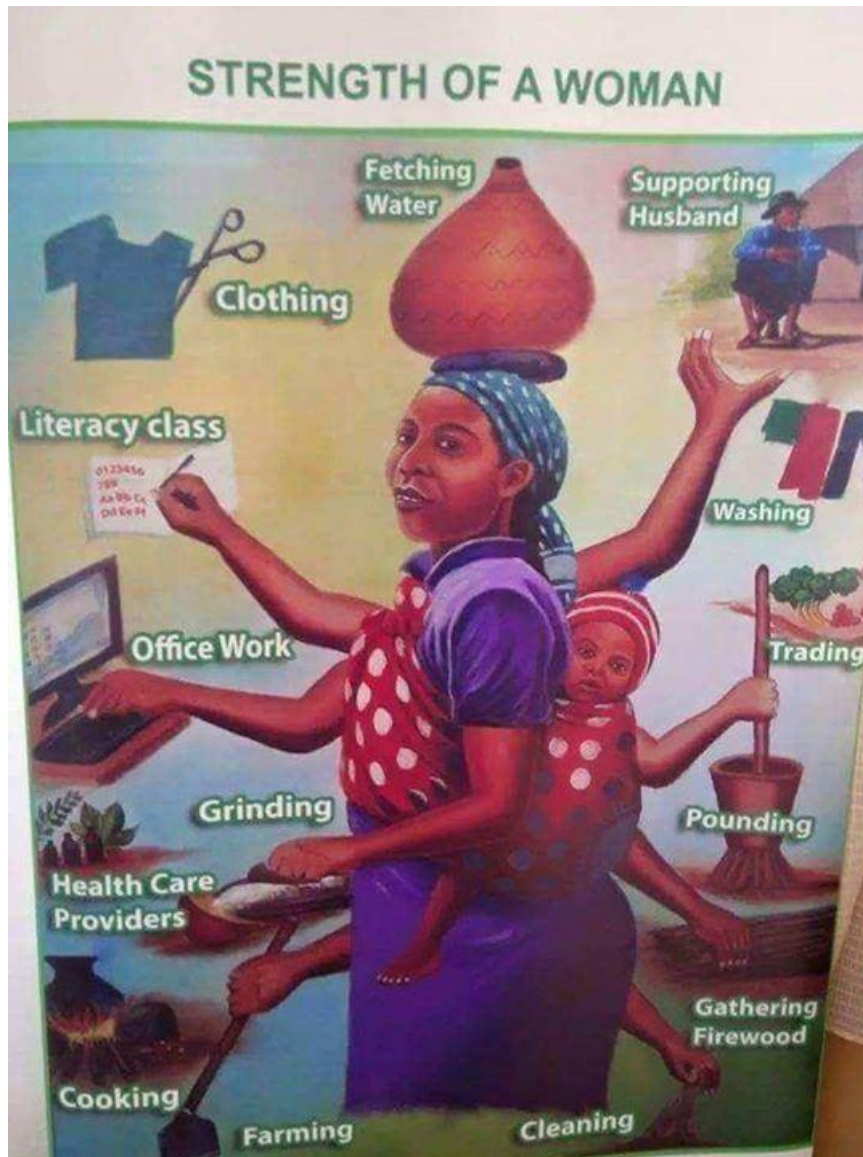
The age groups with more number of participants were the 18-25 and the 26-35 age groups. These comprised fifty six comma eight percent of the total focus group participants (56,8% n=25). This was because the young generation had more interest in the discussions as compared to the elderly. The young generation was generally enthusiastic because they thought they would benefit some change in their journey of life. The elderly had little interest in the discussions because they felt they had nothing much to benefit from them.

### **5.3.1 Roles played by women in homes**

The first question sought to find out the roles performed by women in homes. The researcher gathered that both men and women are aware of the duties that are performed by women in



homes. The respondents outlined several duties performed by women in homes. The cartoon below best summarises the various roles played by women in homes which the participants enlisted.



**Figure 2: Roles played by women**

**Source: Social media (2018).**

The research findings confirm Hudson-Weems' (1987) findings, which describe the Africana woman as a flexible role player hence can play several roles depending on the situation or circumstances surrounding her. The Africana woman can easily adapt to different work environments and experiences. To the researcher's interest both men and women agreed on

the various roles played by women in homes. They also agreed that these roles are central to the sustenance of most homes in African culture but seemed not to notice the status that goes with these responsibilities. The researcher noted with interest that the majority of the respondents (including women themselves) seemed not to notice how much power and control women have in their families and communities. Instead of taking pride in what they do, women took the duties they perform in homes as an extra burden off loaded onto them by men especially nowadays where both husband and wife could be formally employed. This is in line with Kenneth's (1973:6) assertion that, "...in African Traditional society the greater part of women's role is ascribed rather than achieved." It is apparent from the discussions that women think that the roles they play in homes are imposed on them.

About seventy-five percent (75%) (n=32) of the young generation of women of ages ranging between eighteen to forty- five years (18-40years) seek clarity on the concept of equal rights with men especially in areas such as the work place and home. This concurs with Deke's (2017) assertion that industrialisation, rapid economic development and the combination of career and motherhood are responsible for the changing status of African women. This implies that it was the monetary economy that disempowered women.

Most women did not realise that they have power and control which Deke (ibid) acknowledges when he describes women as prescribers of how power and authority have to be utilised; but do so in a non-confrontational manner. Thus the proverb *Chirango ndechina mai mugoti unopiwa anyerere* (The mother knows how to rectify things, she gives the cooking stick with sadza on it to the child who is quiet) describes the skills women have in running homes and making them habitable for everyone. According Schmidt (1992), Shona women have considerable influence in their homes, a reality rarely acknowledged by many. Most women seem not to realise how influential pacesetters they are in families. Some women therefore,

knowingly or unknowingly assist in the creation of myths and biased colonial history with reference to the position of women in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular.

### **5.3.2 Proverbs concerning women**

The researcher noted that participants had little knowledge of proverbs that concern women and their meaning. The roles and status of women embedded in the Shona proverbs were largely unknown to present day women since they did not know these proverbs hence a misconception of their own roles and status as Shona-Karanga women. The proverb *Kusaziva kufa* (Ignorance equals death) best describes the participants' lack of knowledge. The participants who had some knowledge of Shona figurative language did not want to show it since they associated it with backwardness. This denotes that they too succumbed to colonial misconceptions which argue that Africans are uncivilised, barbaric and backward. This has resulted in women discarding their culture in which proverbs empowering them are embedded.

The most popular proverb with most (about 86% n=38) participants (both male and female) from all the four focus groups carried out by the researcher was, *Musha Mukadzi* (A proverb which describes a woman as the central figure in a home). The respondents agreed that the proverb meant that the woman is the key figure responsible for the running and upkeep of the home. In the same vein, African homes without a wife are devoid of warmth, hospitality, care and love. The wife receives visitors and makes sure they are comfortable for the period of their stay. Within the family, the wife or mother provides for the daily needs of the family making sure the home is habitable, smart and that members of the household are well fed and smartly dressed.

The proverb *Ndechembera vakadzi kuva nedinha panhova* (It is in the family line that women have a depression in the fontanelle) best describes the uniqueness by which women perform duties such as carrying various loads such as those of firewood, buckets of mealie meal and

many others on their heads. Most men attribute the possibility of such duties to the cranial depression (which they believe was biologically designed by God to make it possible for women to perform special duties which men cannot perform) on women's heads whereas it is just domestic training from childhood. Their temporary absence makes a great difference in the mood and tone of the children, husband and other members of the family.

One respondent noted that due to the prominence of the wife or mother, most homes are called after them for instance '*Pamusha pamai ngana..*' (The home of the mother of so and so..). This is also the case even if the husband lives with the family. The two proverbs acknowledge that most successful families have hardworking and well organised women or wives behind. It is commonly believed that marrying an industrious woman brings good fortune to the family.

One female participant also mentioned that it is also the wife's duty to look after the husband's welfare. This explains why most men quickly remarry when the wife dies. Women are an indispensable part in men's lives hence the proverb *Kufa kwehosi inosiya imwe* (When senior wife dies she leaves another one to replace her). The proverbs *Mukadzi mumwe inhehwe yomubundwa ikakochechekera pamuti unosara wava mukuna* (One wife is like an animal skin apron of a poor man which when caught on a tree he remains naked) and *Kunyenga zvimvana ita zviviri kuramba kwechimwe chimwe unosara nacho* (In proposing women one should make them two so that if one refuses the other one remains) also describe importance of women in men's lives. All the three proverbs above point to the fact that men cannot do without women therefore, they should always make sure that they have one on 'reserve' so that they are not stranded in the event of death or divorce.

From the participants the researcher gathered that it is also the duty of women to protect and take care of their husbands hence the proverb *Kuroora mukadzi roora muroyi unofuma*

*wowana chinokurwira daka* (When you marry it is best that you marry a witch so that you have someone to fight on your behalf against a grudge). Even if women are said to be witches, they are believed to be full of love and would never harm their own husbands and the proverb *Muroyi haaroyi murume wake* (a witch does not bewitch her husband) best describes that no matter how dreaded and despised witches are, to the husbands they are just their loving wives. According to Schmidt (ibid), witchcraft is a source of power hence, marrying a witch also gives the husband considerable control and pride in Shona communities. The husband of a witch just like his wife would be dreaded and earns ‘respect’ because of the wife’s status. Given that men derive this power from women, it is clear that traditionally, women are indeed empowered contrary to general sentiments on the position of African women.

Furthermore, *Hukwana inodya ndeiri pana mai* (the chick that feeds is the one that is close to its mother) is another proverb which was given by one of the participants who explained it to mean that since it is the mother who feeds her children, the children therefore need to be close to the mother. Those who stay away run the risk of starving. Another proverb which augments the one above is a proverb by Hamutyinei and Plangger (1974) which says that *Shiri nzvere inotamba yakaringa dendere* (A bird that has just hatched young ones plays with other birds whilst keeping an eye on its nest). This proverb also alludes to the duties of female species of caring for its young ones which extends even into the animal kingdom. Therefore, the mother gives preference to fending for her offsprings and provides for their needs.

While participants were able to give another role of mothers as protecting children, they had difficulties in linking this role to a proverb. Women are described as protectors of children hence the proverb, *Rova chiuni amai vari kumunda* (Beat a young girl while the mother is away in the field) (Hamutyinei and Plangger, ibid). The proverb augments well with the proverb *Baba muredzi mwana kuchema anodaidza mai* (A father is just a nurse, when the child

cries it calls the mother). The proverbs explain the closeness between children and their mothers. When in trouble or problem children always turn to their mothers who in turn show them sympathy, love and offer shoulders to lean on.

Another proverb given by participants was *Mwana asiri wako tuka wakaterera izwi ramai vake* (When scolding a child who is not yours, heed the mother's voice) which describes women's role of defending their children. However, its meaning can apply to the general need not to rely on what has been entrusted to you by somebody as the owner might be in need of it anytime. The proverb *Kukwira inyore kuburuka hudana mai* (It is easy to climb but descending will cause one to call for his mother) is used to refer to the tendency by both children and adults to call on the mother during difficult times. It alludes to the mother's role of protecting children and even adults whom they perceive as still in need of her protection despite their age.

Even male participants were aware that for them to get easily to a women's heart they can do so through befriending the child hence the proverb *Mwoyochena weyi tsvimborume kubvisa mwana wemvana madzihwa?* (What sort of kindness is it for a bachelor to wipe the nose of a single mother's child). Care for the young ones is mostly the mother's responsibility. Even at the expense of her conscience the mother may sacrifice to go against societal norms to condone immorality in order to protect her children, hence the proverb, *Mai kunatsa muroyi ziso riri pamwana* (A mother pleases a witch while her eye is on the child).

By the same token a child without a mother is left unprotected hence exposed to all the harsh conditions of life. The Proverb *Mwana asina mai haarari hope dzemasikati* (A motherless child is not allowed to sleep during the day) describes this vulnerability. The proverb *Nherera inoguta musi wafa amai* (An orphan eats plenty of food on the day its mother dies) describes

the same predicament a child without a mother is exposed to. The child without a mother to protect is prone to physical abuse, starvation and all sort of ill- treatment.

About eighty percent of the households under the four chiefs visited by the researcher, women are breadwinners, as professional working class, self employed or as house wives. It is the woman's duty to prescribe how the home should be run including feeding arrangements. The proverb, *Kutema kwamai, bota rinodyiwa nepwere* (The mother gives orders but gruel is eaten by children). Even if women get very little food, they do not satisfy their appetite, but bring it home to feed the children. Thus, women's primary concern is the children. According to one participant, most men on the other hand, think of themselves first.

*Mai vemba igonzo* (A housewife fends for her children like a rat) and *Hapana mhou inokumira mwana asiri wayo* (No cow lows for a calf not hers) describe the role of the mother as the provider of food - hence source of life. A rat is well known for collecting food of all kinds, especially during the night to feed its young ones. The risk involved does not deter it from the noble cause of feeding its young ones. In the same way, the mother risks her life and health to fend for the children.

Women often engage in all kinds of work for the sole purpose of bringing food on the table. This becomes more pronounced in cases where the husband is deceased, unemployed or irresponsible. In many court cases involving the custody of minor children, women are often given the custody of these children for the reason above and in the interests of the child. Mazama (2007) notes that the African women are indeed very powerful and influential since they participate in issues that determine the life of people in communities they live in.

Participants gave qualities of a mother such as kindness, generosity, loving, caring, resilience and many others and were able to support with proverbs such as *Mwoyochena una mai*

*kuyamwisa mwana asiri wavo* (Compassion prompts a mother to suckle a child that is not hers).

Hamutyinei and Plangger (ibid) also have proverbs which describe the power invested in women and show that they are sacred beings not for common use. For example the proverbs *Mai musuva usingasehwi* (Mother is a morsel that is not dipped into gravy) and *Chakona chakona amai havaroodzwi* (What is impossible is impossible a mother cannot be forced to marry). The proverbs describe the value attached to mothers, because of the roles they play in their children's lives. According to Deke (op cit: 96), blood and milk binds the child to the mother and what prevails at the birth of a child and its upbringing constitute avenues of power for the women in African communities. The mother therefore, remains the only true and genuine source of a child since maternity cannot be doubted.

Since the mother plays a significant role in a person's life from conception through birth to adulthood, the two proverbs above make it a taboo to treat one's mother with contempt or to belittle her in any way. These difficulties encountered by a woman after giving birth is depicted in the proverb *Nzira inofamba yomuzvinamimba yomuzvere haifambi* (The journey of a pregnant woman is quicker than that of a woman with a child). Thus, although pregnancy brings more burdens on the mother-to-be, the mother faces more challenges after child birth. A greater part of the mother's time is spent with the child.

It is also a common belief of the Shona-Karanga people that a curse by one's mother is very difficult to rectify unless one pays for his/her wrong doing. If the child fails to pay whilst the mother is still alive, punishment befalls the child in order to force him or her to rectify the problem. A cleansing ritual called *kutanda botso* is then carried out by the perpetrator. The ritual involves a process whereby the perpetrator moves around in rags begging for various types of grain which is collected into one sack. As part of the punishment the perpetrator



sorts the collected grain on his or her own and brews traditional beer to appease the mother's spirit so that he or she is forgiven. This whole process is done to show how sacred a mother is in the Shona –Karanga communities hence should be treated with respect and caution.

One male participant gave the proverb *Kure ndokuna amai, kune mukadzi unofa wasvika* (Far is where the mother is, where the wife is, you risk death to get there) which reflects the immense value the wife has to the husband as compared to the value of the husband's mother has to the man. Thus, taken generally women are important to man. Male participants also concurred that it is not unusual for men to compete in order to win the love and affection of a woman hence the proverb *Mukadzi imbende inokwaturwa pamuti* (A woman is like a grey-backed gerbille which can be peeled off a tree). A man can propose love to a woman, knowing very well that the woman is in love with another man. On the same note, fifty four comma five percent (54, 5% n=6) of male respondents (married) agreed that it is difficult to run a home in the absence of a wife. They gave examples where their wives could be away for various reasons and how they wished they could come back sooner than later. The wife manages the home for the husband and Deke (op cit: 95) has noted that, "The base of power structure in some African communities is in the custody of women."

Another proverb, *Mukadzi inyama ,akatiza ndinotevera* ( A wife is like meat, if she threatens to leave I will definitely go after her) (Munjanja, 1987:16). Most men find their homes inhabitable without their wives. The proverb describes the desperation most men find themselves in when a wife threatens to leave. As a result no man wants to be considered unwise in front of women hence the proverb, *Pamusikana hapana navanava* (All men, even the dullest one becomes active when it comes to women). In many ways, women are the cause of men's motivation to succeed in life. Thus, from a cultural and experiential point of view, women are indispensable and are the locus of the men's attention and life.

In the past most wars between kingdoms were ended by intermarriages. If a king discovered that he could not conquer his rival, he would lure the rival king into marrying by pledging his daughter for marriage to him. This would immediately resolve whatever disagreements between them, thus ending the dispute. Intermarriages thus cemented socio-economic and political relations which enhanced not only political stability but promoted economic development. Thus women are considered as people of great value and have great charm because of their good looks hence even kings could fall prey.

God created women in an attractive way such that no defects are expected on them. There are many proverbs and praise poems composed by men or suitors in praise of women and girls' good looks respectively. The proverbs *Mhandara kuita mavende kuda kuti vanhu vaseke* (A girl having gaps between teeth makes people laugh) and *Manenji kuona mukadzi ane mhanza* (It is astounding to see a woman with a bald head), allude to the fact that women are normally good looking and that it is unusual for them to possess certain features (although these proverbs may have other meanings). Clearly, these proverbs empower women.

Cognisant of their value and beauty, Karanga culture urges women to value their bodies and look after them. Traditional education teaches women how to; sit, dress, relate to men, carry themselves, avoiding premarital sex et cetera. *Usikana ishonga kamwe chikuru umvana* (Girlhood means splendour once, but great remains motherhood) is a proverb concerning girlhood that came from the participants. Elderly participants explained it to mean that besides their good looks, girls or young women should also take pride in their virginity, which once broken by men, will never be restored. So proverbs are a source of wisdom and those who adhere to them preserve their respect, dignity and good status.

These elderly participants explained that culturally, virginity is an integral part of young women and is treasured. Mothers long back received tokens from their sons-in-laws if a girl

was married whilst a virgin. Those daughters who got married after losing virginity brought shame and embarrassment to their mothers and the family at large. The in-laws would send the 'reward' usually a new blanket with a big hole pierced at its centre as sign that their daughter has not been faithful. So every mother would inculcate discipline in their daughters to remain virgins so that they got this reward. Virginity at marriage also earned and still earns the whole family a good name so girls are to stay aloof.

Young women are also made aware that they pass through certain unique experiences of certain stages of life once, hence should always take care. The proverb *Zitakamwe mimba yousikana* (A girl's pregnancy happens once) talks of one of such experiences. The first pregnancy would give a girl a new experience and excitement she has and shall never go through again.

The researcher noted that women themselves are not aware of the power invested in them by their culture hence the need to go back to their past- and find out 'where the rain actually started beating them' and be able to correct the present and their future. Thus, according to May (op cit), women's lost status can be regained by going back to traditional African culture, whose wisdom is reflected in Shona proverbs on women.

### **5.3.3 Other proverbs based on women**

There are also some proverbs that are derived from women's cherished roles, their enduring personality and character. Their meanings generally apply to both men and women and seek to inculcate in humanity these virtues. Hamutyinei and Plannger (op cit) outline several of such proverbs. This category is going to be discussed below.

*Ziriwo rechembere ziramba waravira* (The unattractive relish of an old woman is refused only after tasting it, meaning that do not judge a book by its cover) is one of the proverbs. The general meaning of the proverb is that one should not be put off by appearances. The

personality portrayed here is that the old woman is usually physically unattractive but within her she is full of wisdom and constructive advice/ ideas hence people must not just be put off by her old looks. The proverb also alludes to women's role of cooking which is done better by older women despite their deceiving looks. Age therefore, comes with greater understanding, cooking skills as well as deeper experiences of life. In this case, even at old age, women remain a symbol of unparalleled achievements in life such that they should not just be discarded into the dustbins of women history based on their outward appearance.

In Shona, the elderly are believed to be libraries hence the saying that if an old person dies, a library would have been burnt. So to speak, they are mobile sources of wisdom. The old are custodians of the Shona culture and traditions since traditions and customs are passed on from one generation to the next orally. In Shona-Karanga cultures, the old women are the ones responsible for sex education of young girls and make sure they are inducted into marriage whilst they are still virgins so as to have lasting marriages. Girls are discouraged from divorce since this would be a sign that she was not taught well. Furthermore, the Shona culture discourages men from marrying divorced women thus, the proverb *Ibvapamwe hairoorwi* (One should not marry a divorced woman) (Chimhundu 2001). This encouraged continuity of the family and procreation, thus the woman is an important partner in marriage.

Important matters concerning marriage cannot bypass one's grandmother hence the proverb *Kuwana ndimbuya* (In order to marry a girl one has to through the grandmother). The elderly women can easily pick signs of young girls' maturity through observing the movement of young men around the girl hence the proverb *Kuona chembere yodzinga shiri zviyo zvaibva* (If an old woman chases away birds it means the grain is ripening). So despite their old ugly looks, the old women are responsible for new and everlasting happy marriages in the Shona communities.

Grandmothers also play roles of assisting mothers with the care of the newly born child. The grandmother assists with the receiving of gifts from those who came to congratulate the family for the coming of the new member of the family. According to Clive and Kileff (1970), if the baby happened to be female he who intends to be the future suitor brought a log to the grandmother who in turn gave it to mother of the child as a token and way of communicating his future intentions, hence the proverb, *Pazvarwa budzi pade danda rambuya* (once a squash has been produced, footprints become numerous). Culturally the squash symbolises the newly born girl and the log a symbol that one day she will have a suitor and eventually gets married. So the grandmother ensures the continuity of the institution of marriage and the family.

The old women according to Schmidt (op cit) gained more power and higher statuses in families. They become wiser and speak words of wisdom as alluded to by the proverb *Chembere inonhuwa mukanwa mangwana inoreva zvibvira* (An old woman's stinking mouth may say the truth tomorrow). The old also have skills on how to achieve or acquire anything they need. The proverb in Hamutyinei and Plangger (op cit: 366) *Zvatumwa wabvira chembere kutumwa mutsago nashe svike yopereka nendiro* (It is great fun if an old woman sent to fetch the chief's pillow brings it on a plate) describes the exaggeration by which things are done by the old in order to get favours from whoever is at a position of comparative advantage.

Because of the experience gained through age, culturally the old are respected for their skills and wisdom. *Mhanje isina mwana hainzi ichembere* (A barren woman should not be considered as an old one) is another proverb which alludes to the fact that people should not be deceived by looks. It is derived from the role and experience of women in child bearing or the lack of it. The knowledge and experience an old woman who has had children cannot be equated to that of barren women (who has not had children). Though both may look alike,

through the fact that they both have no children at face value, the old woman will have gone through childbearing while the barren woman has never gone through it. The old woman with children would have seen it all. Her experience starts from her first pregnancy, coupled with its joys and challenges till birth of the child. She would have raised several children of differing and complex, good and bad characters hence the proverb, *Munhumbu manyachide munozvarwa mbavha nomuroyi* (From a beloved woman's womb comes a thief and a witch).

Due to their long time experience, old women do not easily give up on getting what they want. They have resilience which is described in proverbs like *Zvinokona zviine hata chembere ichikonewa musoro wenzou* (It is after a trial with a head ring that an old woman admits failure to lift an elephant's head). This proverb is derived from women's attributes of carrying loads on the head while men use their shoulders. *Zvinhu zviedzwa chembere yakabika mabwe ikamwa muto* (Things must be tried an old woman tried to boil stones) is a proverb derived from women's roles as cooks and caterers for the family. Thus, women do not easily give up when it comes to fending for the family. They have many ways of exploring several avenues in life even where things seem impossible. Thus women are indeed versatile and initiative in the most stressful situations in life.

The duty and role of preparing food for the family is the hallmark of a good wife and mother hence the proverb *Kunzi mukadzi ari apa kunatsa munyu* (In order to be called a proper house wife, a woman must know how to season her relish). The wife's ability to prepare delicious meals wins her the love of her husband and keeps the husband home hence the saying, *Varume "tumbwanana...hatubvi pamusuo patunopiwa mukaka"* (Men are like puppies that do not leave a place where they are given milk) (Hodza, 1974: 45). One of the virtues that are taught women of marriageable age is the need and ability to prepare food for the husband hence *Ziva murume wako paura* (Know your husband when it comes to feeding) (Hodza ibid).

In most cases the community mid wives in Shona communities are the old women who are respected for this national duty. According to Muponde and Taruvinga (2002) midwifery skills of African women furthered their qualification. So, through women and by the assistance of fellow women, children come into the world. Thus the concept of genuine sisterhood which is one of the eighteen principles of Africana woman by Hudson-Weems (1987) is fulfilled. It is therefore foolhardy for a woman of child-bearing age not to give due respect to mid wives hence the proverb *Usachenjedza nyamukuta kuzvara uchakuda* (Do not deceive the mid wife while you still want to bear children). If one does so, it means that the midwife would withdraw her services to the woman who would be in trouble since women with mid wifery skills were and still are few. It is therefore difficult for someone to dispute the fact that women played a central role in their societies in light of this evidence.

The proverb, *Chomungozva chinodyiwa neabata mwana* (Food from a nursing mother is eaten by one who holds her child) generally means that one good turn deserves another. The proverb describes the role played by women in the discipline of children. Children are taught to do good so that in return they also have good things done to them. Women are thus the first teachers of children and their role deserves recognition.

Breast feeding mothers are provided with good and nutritious food so that they have enough milk to nourish the baby and to replenish themselves. The proverb *Mabasa kuwanda muzvere kurarira tsenza* (Because of too much work in the house an edible tuber cannot feed a mother who has just given birth) describes how close the diet of a woman who has just given birth should be watched. Children often crave for the food and in order to get some, one has to perform some duty so that he or she is given this food. In so doing, children are being taught that they should not expect good things to come their way without working for them, thus teaching against laziness. This proverb also relates to one of the most important duties of motherhood namely child bearing and care. This role is greatly valued since it ensures the

continuity of the family and posterity hence setting aside special food is in recognition of that role. Women thus groomed children into well-cultured, hardworking and responsible citizens.

Besides the special diet the woman who has just given birth is given, her role of child bearing is treated with honour and dignity hence the proverb *Mungozva haabikiri vamwe sadza* (A woman who has just given birth does not cook for others). The blood during birth is sacred and in other African cultures defiles the woman who is then treated as unclean culturally. It is therefore a taboo for her to prepare and serve people food. This is done on one hand for hygienic purposes and on the other hand to allow the woman to rest and recover well. Thus the role of childbearing is celebrated in Shona –Karanga communities and given due credit and attention it deserves.

The proverb, *Kugocha kunoda kwaamai komwana kunodzima moto* (Roasting requires of the mother; that of the child puts out fire) (Hamutyinei and Plangger, op cit) means correction is meted out to the young and never to the old. The proverb could have been derived from the fact that the mothers do things perfectly well as compared to children. The process of roasting requires certain skills which ought to be acquired through age and experience. Thus it is the mothers' role to prepare food for the family. Since mothers would have done this since childhood, their experience becomes better than that of a child.

Another proverb by Chimhundu (op cit: 1139) *Iharoziva kuti chide mukadzi wababa* (It is obvious that the most beloved woman is the father's wife) means that certain things need not be explained because they require one's common sense. The proverb could have been derived from a common practice in the Shona–Karanga culture which discourages man from staying without a wife and considers a wife as the only person that brings happiness to a man. Also the proverb *Mukadzi isango rinotsvakwa huni naani naani* (A woman is like a forest in which everybody can find wood) and *Mukadzi itsime rinoti asvika anocherawo* (A woman is like a



well from which everybody can fetch water) allude to the fact that women are an indispensable part of every man's life. The two proverbs literally allude to women's roles as caterers and sources of life. They also refer to the women's irresistible charm that attracts men.

Culturally, a man would be incomplete without a wife and eventually children. So acquiring a wife for oneself is considered one of the greatest achievements in a man's life. Given that men would be miserable and incomplete without women, it indicates that women are the key that unlocks the door of happiness for every man if the marriage institution is kept as sacred as it is supposed to be. In this regard, without women, men almost amount to nothing. The proverb *Inhamo zvayo tsvimborume kuveza duri seine mukadzi* (It is painful sight to see a bachelor carving a mortar as though he has a wife) shows a degree of frustration a man without a wife can lead.

In the past a man underwent crucial tests for him to prove that he was old enough to marry, for example, he could be required to kill a lion or a leopard alone to prove his manhood. Failure to do so would mean that the man would fail to look after his wife and the family. In this view, it is clear that what men ended up achieving or becoming was as a result of women's involvement in their lives either directly or indirectly. The proverb *Gwerevengwe aiva rema, chakamuchenjedza vasikana* (Gwerevengwe was a dull man but became wise because of women) best alludes to these experiences which men underwent in order to win a wife. Thus women are highly regarded and cherished as panacea to men's problem of solitude. Women therefore change men for the better. Without them, many men would lead a desperate life.<sup>ol</sup>

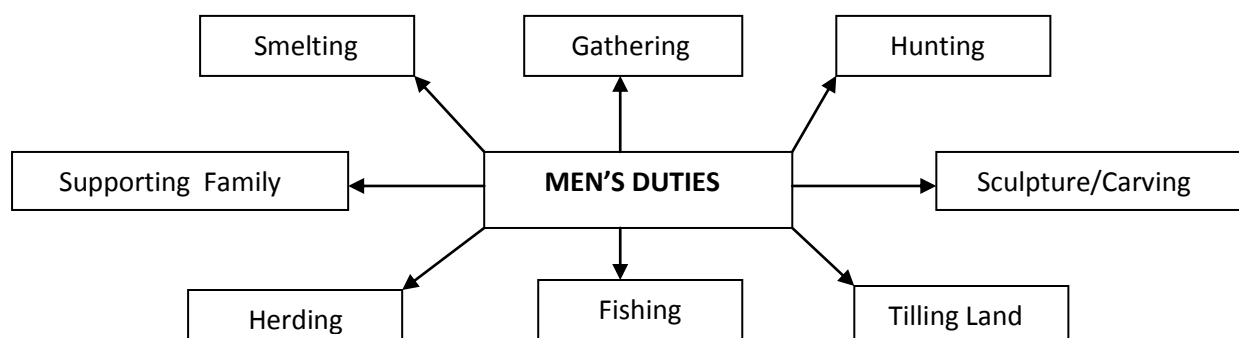
The proverb *Mudzimu mukuru ndowokwamai* (The maternal ancestors are valued more than the paternal ones) alludes to the significance attached to the spirit of one's maternal parents

including the spirit of one's mother in looking after the living children. This is the reason why the Shona culture on the payment of *lobola*, requires the son-in-law to pay *mbwazukuru* (a goat given to mother's mother) as a way of appeasing the maternal ancestors so that they bless and guide the girl's marriage (Gombe, 1998:109). Such spirits, once angry or grieved bring misfortune to the living children. Moreover, the maternal spirits hit harder than the paternal ones; killing all her children in fury unlike the paternal spirits. It also reflects that when mothers are wronged, they become intense in their hatred, wrath and fury as they are in their love. The idiom *Midzimu yadambura mbereko* (the ancestors have broken the child sling) alludes to the mother's role in bringing up the child on her back. Thus during traditional rituals, one's maternal ancestors are included alongside the paternal ancestors. This motivates the living to maintain good relationships with their maternal parents.

Another role played by mothers is that of peacemakers. They maintain peace and tranquillity amongst their children and acquaintances. As a result relationship through mothers is usually genuine and lasting. There are no inheritance disputes since people do not share the same totem. The proverb *Ukama hwokwamai hahuna rwiranhaka* (Relationship on the mother's side does not lead to inheritance quarrels) describes the safety embedded in associating with relatives from one's mother's side. This implies that when all is well, women play an invaluable role whether they are alive or in their afterlife.

#### 5.3.4 Men's duties in pre-colonial Zimbabwe

Respondents across all age groups were aware of the duties that were performed by men in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The diagram below outlines duties which the respondents enlisted.



### **Figure 3: Men's duties in pre-colonial Zimbabwe.**

**Source: Research data 2019**

The respondents came up with these duties without any difficulties. The respondents were also aware that in the pre-colonial period gender roles of men and women were well defined and did not overlap but complemented each other. However, male respondents complained that today's women take men's duties in the name of equal rights and this has posed many problems in today's communities and homes. One male respondent argued that women's fight for equal rights is the source of their problems today. The women of today no longer submit themselves under men, "*Havachadi kuzvidzikisa pasi pevarume vakadzi ava. Voda masimuka tienzane saka zvichivaomera*" (Woman nowadays do not want to submit to men that is why they are facing difficulties).

Young male respondents who constituted seventy two comma two percent (72, 7% n=8) of focus group male participants noted that women have moved away from their traditional gender roles and have burdened themselves by demanding equal opportunities with men. Male respondents cited the kitchen as the rightful place for women. There, she exercises her rights and no normal woman would leave home without putting her hut in order hence the proverb *Mhandara inosara yoseka, kumba yashanda* (A girl laughs after she has finished housework). The proverb also celebrates women's foresight, proactive thinking and self-discipline. This also stipulates that women are supposed to know what to prioritise. The men then go out to fend for the family while the women wait to receive what has been brought home by men hence complementary gender roles between men and women. This, they argued, was their understanding of the proverb *Musha mukadzi*.

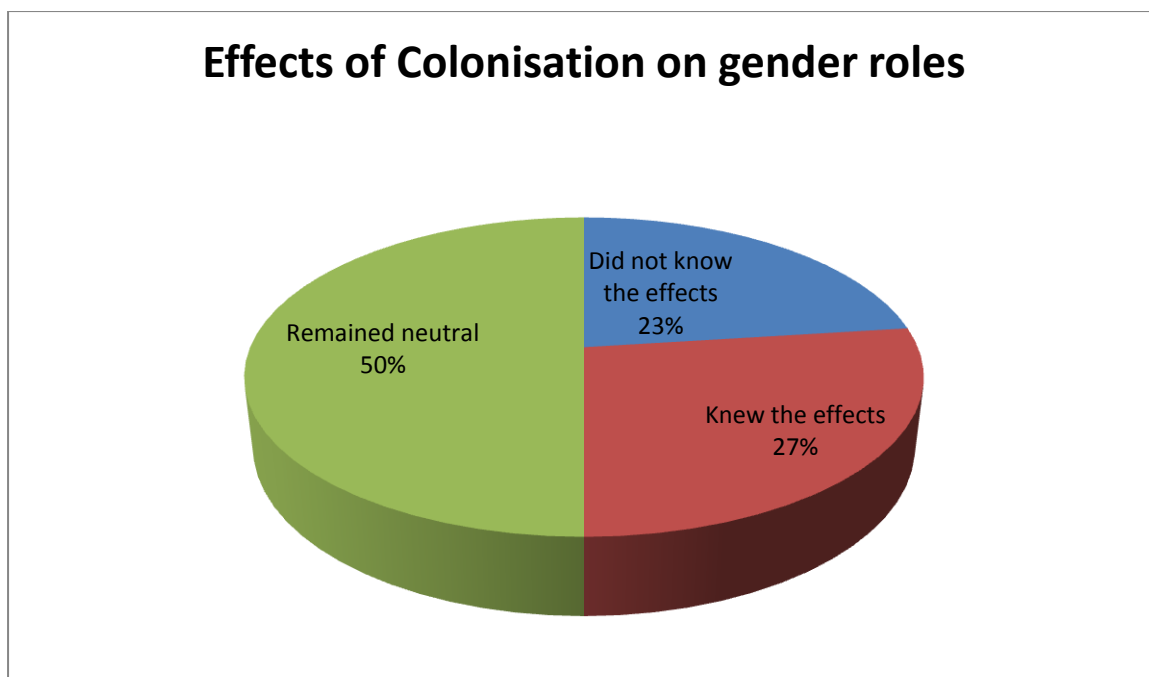
The male participants also argued that the role of women is to get married, look after the home, bear children and bring them up. They supported their arguments with the proverbs

*Kuwanikwa igwara vasikana vose vanofamba naro* (Marriage is like a path which all girls have to use) and *Musikana rufuta runobarika* (A girl is like a seed of castor oil which scatters from an exploding pod). The later proverb also means that once a girl has come of age she has to get married and start her own family and eventually bear children of her own too. This alludes to women's role as child bearers and founders of families.

A heated argument also arose between the young men and young working class women who argued that they should do as they wish with their salaries since the salaries represent the traditional *tseu*, that is, a field specifically for the woman in Shona traditional culture whose proceeds entirely belong to her (Schmidt, op cit). These women argued that since culture is not static, men's attitude towards the woman's estate should also change with the changing times. Young men argued that these salaries are the source of most disputes in homes since women feel they are now at par with men. As a result, the complementarity of gender roles which was there in the pre-colonial period no longer exists. It was compromised by the introduction of the cash economy. Thus Deke (op cit) correctly blames the money economy introduced by Western culture for the diminishing status of women. Women themselves have taken part in this diminishing status either knowingly and unknowingly under a thin veil of colonial sentiments which claim that this is real women empowerment.

### **5.3.5 Colonisation and gender roles**

Very few of the respondents were able to figure out the effects colonisation of Zimbabwe had on gender roles. About twenty three percent (23%) (n=10) of the respondents proved ignorant of the effects whilst twenty seven (27%) (n=12) gave effects of colonisation on gender roles. Fifty percent (50%) (n=22) of the respondents were not sure of the effects so they remained neutral. The pie chart below illustrates the respondents' views.



**Figure 4: colonisation and gender roles**

**Source: research data 2019**

The respondents gave the effects that include the change of social status, change in gender roles for both men and women and diminishing status of women. According to Schmidt (op cit), Western missionaries described Shona women as adulterous, unhygienic and blamed them for the refusal of men to work in farms and mines. If women indeed discouraged men to work for the white men, then this might be positive in that it portrays women as powerful and influential in their families. Missionaries further stated that women forbade their husbands to go away for a long time because they had a higher sex drive. This view is not only sexist but racist to the core. Such unfounded assumptions and allegations need to be treated cautiously as they give a warped view of African women. The Missionaries' wrong perception of Shona women was derived from the Western perception of women in that culture. Clearly, this misconception of Shona women led to the crafting of a wayward history which most people tend to believe. Thus the main purpose of this research is to reverse this line of thinking which in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's words can be referred to as 'decolonising the mind.'

The respondents cited the introduction of formal education as a good development with the only setback being that the girl child was left behind. The Shona people embraced education but gave preferential treatment to the boy child. The respondents attributed this to the patriarchal mind set of the Shona people which gives preference to men as heads of the households and as bread winners for the family including the wife. Giving preferences to the male child is not cultural. Male education according to Schmidt's (op cit) point of view, was introduced so that the white settler could have manpower in farms and mines.

However, this does not mean that women are considered less important in such societies. They also have their roles that are equally important compared to their male counterparts. As a result, parents get worried if their married daughters are ill-treated by their in-laws or face any problems hence the proverb *Kubereka mwanasikana kuchengeta mangava* (To bear a daughter is to store up troubles).

Another proverb which describes the value of the girl child and the need to protect and support her is, *Ane mhuri ndeane mhurikadzi varume vaeni* (the one with daughters has a family sons will look after themselves). For parents in most Shona communities, female children are considered a liability as they should be looked after and safeguarded against abuse while males need not much protection. Many people of Western origin and culture and some respondents misconstrued this care and protection of the girl child as oppression. Parents placed the same value and importance on children of both sexes. The Shona culture has a belief that as long as one has a child, sex does not matter since parents can acquire a 'child' of the opposite sex in the form of a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law when their child gets married hence the proverbs *Kuzvara hadzi kuzvare ndume* (To beget a female is to beget a male) and the opposite *Kuzvare rume kuzvare hadzi* (To beget a male is to beget a female). These two proverbs depict that according to Shona culture both the girl child and the boy child were equal.

Twenty seven percent of the participants (27% n=12) who were citing changes during the colonial period described female education as good, although it had its own challenges. According to Schmidt (op cit) female formal education which was introduced later than male education during the colonial period was welcomed by the girls. However their parents despised it accusing Western education of turning their children against traditional marriage customs. Traditional Shona customs encourages intermarriages with people of local origin whose background they know well for stable and sustainability of their children's marriages. The Shonas believe in the proverb *Roora mwana wababa vane dongo* (Marry a girl whose father's abandoned home is known). Those girls who thought they were 'enlightened' departed from the norms and values of their culture.

Shunning local traditions and culture has eroded the empowerment that women had before colonisation. For instance, girls became mischievous and preferred to marry men of their choice, thus disregarding traditional ways of marriage such as child-pledging and arranged marriages. Many girls ended up eloping with men of their choice. Yet the parents expected them to follow their traditions and customs hence the proverb *Chitiyo kupinda muzai kuona mai* (When the chicken enters an egg, it sees its mother). Children were expected to emulate their parents' way of life.

The introduction of the cash economy compared to the pastoral life the Shona people lived resulted in men being offered jobs for remuneration which subordinated women to men. The participants cited type of jobs introduced as including working in farms, hotels and mines and that resulted in the movement of males to towns. This meant that men's social status was raised at the expense of that of women. The other effects of men's movement to towns given by the respondents were;

1. Separation of family members that were living happily together,

2. The upgrading of men's status to a higher level than that of women because of economic empowerment,
  3. Since men were working for the white men, they learnt to speak the white men's language hence men became superior to women,
  4. Changing of gender roles for men since some of the jobs included being cooks which was traditionally women's work,
  5. The woman on the other hand, had more roles and duties to perform in the rural areas where she remained; performing the duties of the husband who would have moved to towns
- These changes were best described by Deke (op cit) who views them as posing challenges on the crucial roles played by women in African Traditional Religion and necessitated a shift in the original perception of womanhood.

From the respondents' view, these changes were both positive and negative on both men and women during the colonial period. For men it was positive in the sense that they were economically empowered and negative in that their social status was lowered, for example being cooks which was traditionally women's work. For women it was more negative than positive. The woman was left to look after children alone in rural areas and her position was lowered since she was economically disempowered and now depended on the man. Moreover, she was being called names by the colonialist who saw her as an obstacle and threat to their acquisition of manpower for their mines and farms (Schmidt, op cit).

However, when women were left alone in the rural areas, they learnt survival skills to cope with solitude and to support the children in cases where the husband became irresponsible. In this case, women ran the show by themselves. This is how many homesteads came to be called after the wife. Deke (op cit) states that the women who remained in rural areas became the custodians of Shona traditions and culture whilst men drifted away from the traditions



hence women remained stronger culturally than men and this gave them a higher status in Shona culture.

### **5.3.6 Pre-colonial era and status of women**

When asked which of the three eras; the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial, accorded women a high and original status, the respondents chose the pre-colonial period after getting insights from previous discussions. They gave several reasons for choosing the pre-colonial period some of which includes:

1. Men and women lived together hence they struggled together. So they shaped their destinies together. This is one of the principles of Africana womanism by Huddison –Weems (op cit),
2. Gender roles were well defined and complemented each other, thus maintaining harmony in families and societies,
3. There was no monetary economy hence no one was inferior to the other,
4. Both men and women were satisfied by their social status,
5. The woman played several significant roles which ranged from mothers to religious leaders which accorded them a high status – thus they were flexible role players which is another principle of Africana Womanism by Huddison-Weems (op cit).

### **5.3.7 Challenges on performance of roles by women today**

About sixty-four percent (64%)(n=28) of the female respondents described several challenges being faced by women today in executing their duties or roles. They complained that men are given more opportunities to realise their full potential. Young women gave an example of how girls do domestic chores after school that boys do not do. They added that they are even expected to serve boys their food, whom they believe would have spent their time roaming about aimlessly after school. Thus, women felt they are not given same ground as men to tread on. The ground is not level but it is biased towards men.

Women also felt their rights are being infringed upon thereby hindering them from performing their duties well. The society seems not supportive enough for women. Despite

the call for equal rights, still women are looked down upon at the work places, public places and other spheres of life. According to Langa (2018), even traditional leadership and structures still marginalise women and look down upon them. Cited as an example in her article are positions of chieftainship in Zimbabwe where only six (6) out of two hundred and eighty six (286) chiefs are women. The rest are men, and the situation is prevalent in most African countries in the continent. Zambia has been cited as another example with thirty (30) female chiefs out of two hundred and eighty eight (288). Such anomalies women feel, should be addressed and rectified.

Despite all the calls for equal treatment many families even today still give preferential treatment to male children than female ones. One female respondent cited her own situation where the parents opted to send her brother to University while she goes to a College (although she had better passes than the brother) for the reason that she would soon marry and leave the family after spending a lot of money on her.

To put it in her own words, “*Zvakandirwadza ende vabereki vangu ndakavatsamwira handivaregereri nezvavakandiita. Dai ndiri kure soo neupenyu*” translated, “I have so much pain for what happened and I am still bitter with my parents for what they did and I will not forgive them. I would have achieved more in life by now.” Some present day parents still believe in the proverb *Ane mhuri kwayo ndeane ndume ane munhukadzi vaeni* (One with a real family is one who has boys, one with a family of girls has strangers). The proverb underlines the importance of the male children in some families today and the value placed in them. However, this patriarchal mindset was not found to be widespread in this study.

Another challenge given by the female respondents was that the male child is given more freedom in the home than the females. A male child’s movements are not monitored and restricted but the female child’s movements are always monitored and restricted. Freedom of

association is also restricted with female children than that of the male child. This did not go down well with the young girls even though the parents do so for genuine reasons of protecting them.

### **5.3.8 Possible solutions to challenges**

The following were given as possible solutions to problems faced by women in executing the roles:

1. Parents to treat both sexes equally,
2. Parents to listen to the girl child's complaints,
3. More awareness campaigns to uplift the girl child,
4. Males to be educated on the importance of treating members of the opposite sex fairly,
5. Society to treat women fairly and accord them their rightful status.

## **5.4 DATA OBTAINED FROM INTERVIEWS**

The researcher targeted six interviewees per chief who were above sixty-five years of age who could not walk to the meeting points where the researcher met other participants. The researcher visited them in their homes and was able to meet seventy comma eight percent (70,8%) (n=17) of the participants. This group was of interest to the researcher due to their treasured knowledge of the past and the present. They have lived in the colonial and post colonial periods hence could compare the role and status of women in these two eras. Thus the elderly are regarded as libraries in the Shona traditional culture.

### **5.4.1 Status of women today**

When asked to give the status of women today various views came from the old men and women the researcher interviewed. Some of the views that came up were that women's status has improved greatly as compared to old times. An example was that today women are allowed to speak in public which was a taboo in the past.

The respondents also stated that a lot of rights which were not accorded to women in the past have been put in place hence the status of women has improved greatly. Some of the rights which were given by the respondents included being accorded the same opportunities with men in terms of education and employment opportunities. A female respondent stated that women have been accorded more than enough rights making them uncontrollable. She said, “*Vakakura zvinhu zvanaka vasikana vanhasi ava.*” (These girls grew up in a conducive/friendly environment).

The respondents also cited freedom of expression as another area that has improved greatly when compared to the past. Women can now express themselves freely without any restrictions as was in the past hence women can freely refuse to carry out certain decisions they find are not good for them.

#### **5.4.2 Comparisons between present and past status of women**

Interviewees were asked to comment on the differences between the status of women today and in the past. Various views were aired out by the respondents. One old man explained that most women were not allowed to speak in public because many women are naturally outspoken and impulsive as compared to men hence need control. The old man cited the former first lady of Zimbabwe who was outspoken to the extent that she shouted at some ministers during public rallies as an example of the reason why women were not allowed to speak in public in the past.

He cited the proverb *Usaravidza chembere muto wegwaya mangwana inofira mudziva* (Do not allow an old woman to taste soup of fish otherwise you find her drowning in a pool) describing that women may go out of hand if given a chance to lead. Women may also misuse privileges and put those around them in danger. Thus the proverb *Kupa mukadzi banga wazvikohwera rufu* (To give a knife to a wife is to invite your death) Hamutyinei and Plannger (op cit) also alludes to women’s impulsiveness and short temperedness.

Stopping women from speaking in public, according to the old man, were checks and balances put in place to avoid public embarrassment. The proverb cited in Chimhundu (op cit) *Nharokadzi ihunzamosva* (A woman who looks for trouble will always drag her husband in court to listen to the wife's cases) describes those women who always brought trouble for their husbands because of bad behaviour. So for men to control this, women were represented by men in public as a precautionary measure to avoid embarrassment. Thus the whites misunderstood some aspects of Shona culture and interpreted them wrongly.

This was misconstrued by Westerners as oppression of women (Schmidt, op cit) yet Shona – Karanga culture gives women considerable liberty to make decisions on matters to do with their personal life hence the proverb, *Zviri kumvana kubara mwana asina baba* (It is up a single mother to bear a child without a known father). The proverb *Mhosvakadzi muripo mwene* (A woman's fine is her very self) alludes to the practice in the past where a woman who committed a crime against a man and unable to pay for it may decide to offer herself for marriage to the man as repayment. So it is not cultural for one to conclude that the Shona–Karanga culture oppresses woman.

One woman also commented that in the past, cultural practises such as widow inheritance were oppressive of women. She said the widow was not given latitude to choose a new husband either from the family or outside but was forced to stay and remarry in the family although she may have wanted to leave and remarry outside. Again this is a misconception of this practice and this was the reason why such cultural practices were banned by whites during the colonial period. The proverb *Nhaka yambuya ndeyemombe yemunhu inozvigova yega* (Inheritance from grandmother consists of cattle but as for a person, inheritance is self-determined) shows that the woman is given considerable freedom to choose who she wants to marry during the widow inheritance ritual.

Married women noted that in the past, women were inducted to answer their husbands using a Shona title, '*Shewee*' meaning 'My King.' They argued that the husband was regarded as a 'king' and this was a sign of oppression of women who were to serve the 'King' loyally despite his flaws, if he had any. This perception shows another misconception of Shona-Karanga culture where calling one's husband 'King' is a statement of honour which means that the husband is to carry himself as one. This honorific title does not only confer privileges to the husband, but gives him responsibilities to provide for the family and protect it. Just as the king is assisted to make decisions by members of his court, the husband as 'King' is assisted by his wife (the queen) to make decisions in the family, thus making the wife an indispensable counterpart in decision making. In the political set up of pre-colonial Africa, in the Mutapa State, the Principal wife was part of the king's advisory council, (Mudenge 2011). Her involvement shows that women are empowered and respected for their wisdom which makes a difference in the day to day running of the state.

Thus women according to Schmidt, (op cit) wielded considerable power and credited by colonial masters for their influence over their husbands. This concurs with Deke 's (op cit) assertion that the woman had considerable power at all levels in African culture although this power was invisible thus being misunderstood and undetected by colonialist travellers, journalists, researchers and historians who invaded the continent. Women made decisions in the background or behind the scenes that were then announced by men to the public. In the family, the husband as 'King' would then oversee the implementation of the decisions, monitoring and evaluating progress towards the targets set together with women as sources of some initiatives. This domestic and foreign policy was misconstrued by many scholars and anthropologists of the Shona-Karanga culture.

Some respondents, despite their age, also misconstrued greed and oppression with African culture. For example, one old man said no woman was allowed to object to anything the

husband said or instructed her to do. He added that men would also be given preferential treatment during meal times whereby the men could even eat *sadza* with meat whilst the wife and children ate *sadza* with vegetables. This, the old man described as the downside of Shona-Karanga culture as it at times looked down upon women. Even under such circumstances one does not have to exaggerate the influence that men have over women.

Another view that came out was that in the past women also wielded considerable power especially in their paternal homes as aunts (that is one's father's sisters). Aunts are respected in the Shona culture and make important decisions in their brothers' homes. Thus, they have intrinsic value even though they now belong to another family. This status is increased by the *lobola* (bride price) paid by their husbands which contribute economically to the development of paternal families hence the proverb *Mwanasikana ndimapfumise* (A daughter enriches her family). Part of this *lobola* is used to pay *lobola* for the brothers' wives. By the same token, a man who has more daughters is considered rich. It is also in the same vein that girls from poor backgrounds who marry into rich families save their families from hunger and starvation hence the proverb *Kuroorera mukarabwe muchena waisa udyi mumba* (To marry a girl from a poor family feeding more people). In this case women become agents of economic change to their families. Given that women assist in transforming the lives of their families permanently, it can be deduced that they had more value than the colonialists would like us to believe.

The aunts settle disputes between their brothers and their wives, or between their feuding brothers. In the two cases, the aunts perform the roles of judges and peace makers; making binding decisions and lasting peace for both her brothers and their wives. Their decisions are always a reference point or precedence when the same matters arise again. Thus the aunt wielded tremendous power, authority and high standing in domestic issues (Gombe, op cit).

The first wife in a polygamous marriage is also highly regarded in the Shona culture. She is called by the honorary title *vahosi* (first wife) which gives her respect from the husband and control from junior wives. No man marries another wife without the consent of his first wife. The husband seeks permission first, persuades her and pays some token to the first wife so that he is allowed to take in another wife. If that is done properly, the first wife would even look for a wife for her husband if he needed one since according to Gombe (op cit), women were groomed to accept that a man does not belong to one wife. Thus the husband respects his wife's feelings and respects her decisions. This goes a long way in maintaining family cohesion and oneness of purpose.

It is also a taboo to divorce the first wife no matter how bad the husband thinks she is. Instead of divorcing his first wife the husband is allowed to bring in another wife. Thus the Shona culture protects the women's status and this keeps the society intact since divorces are curbed through these checks and balances. The woman's dignity is also protected as well as her status. The coming of the second wife does not reduce the first wife to a nonentity (Gombe, op cit). Instead, her status is raised to the position of a mentor whose duty is to induct the new wives into the culture of their new family; its morals and cherished values that the older wife knows pretty well then by virtue of experience. The new wife or wives who are her apprentices, treat their mentor with honour and serve her. She is the conduit of their communication with the husband.

It is anathema to ill treat one's mother in Shona culture due to the important roles they play from the child's conception, birth, upbringing and grooming hence the proverb *Mai mugoti usingasehwi*. Reference has been made to the cleansing appeasement ritual that should be performed by the offender in cases where the offended and angry mother dies and becomes an avenging spirit. The degrading and humiliating process of the *kutanda botso* ritual the



once ungrateful child goes through is deterrent enough to the other children of similar persuasion.

It was discovered from the elderly participants that while children can offend the father, the consequences are less severe. Another reason given for the need to honour and respect the mother is that the mother is a *mutorwa* (foreigner) in the husband's family. This is consistent with the treatment of all foreigners in Shona culture. This again accords women a higher status since many people avoid future trouble by treating them well and with respect. This applies even today. Such clear evidence should be considered as it demonstrates that women are indeed empowered in the Shona-Karanga culture.

#### **5.4.3 Government initiatives to promote the girl child in Zaka District**

Another question asked by the researcher was a question on what the government is doing in the district to promote the girl child. Respondents were aware of the various programmes and were happy about the government initiatives to promote the girl child. They mentioned Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which cater for the girl child that were also working in the district and improving the girl child's life. Programs like Campaign for Female education (CAMFED) donate sanitary ware, offer food programs for underprivileged girls. CAMFED also provides uniforms and pay tuition for needy girls around the district. The fact that CAMFED solely targets the girl child clearly testifies that there is real determination to bridge the gap that was created by the monetary economy of the colonialists.

The organisation also provides Mothers' Support Group (MSG) with grants to do some income generating projects. Some of the projects run include poultry and gardening. The MSGs then plough back their profits targeting specifically the girl child. The MSGs assist through payment of school fees, buying uniforms and stationery. They also offer guidance and counselling programs especially to the girl learner. Such projects empower women to be

business minded and sustain themselves. These projects assist in producing independent women as well.

OXFAM also targets widows and needy women in rural areas so as to improve their livelihoods and those of their children. It offers food hampers as well as giving them financial assistance. Every woman in the program gets eight United States American dollars (8 USD) and if she has children they also get the same amount each. Thus OXFAM uplifts the status of rural women and assist them fight poverty. This interventionist policy gives hope to the widows and the girl child.

There are also some awareness campaigns that take place around the district so as to protect and improve the welfare of the girl child. These campaigns educate the girl child about sex and sexuality, adolescence sexual and reproductive health, sexual and other abuses. Recently the government introduced vaccination programs yearly to all girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen years against the human papilloma virus (HPV) thus promoting the girl child's health.

Presidential scholarships have assisted the girl child to a greater extent although it targets both sexes. At least under every chief, a girl benefited from the program. Widows are also given some grants to survive on. The current first lady is moving around the country campaigning for the well fare of the widows and their rights over inheritance of the deceased husband's estates. She also recently introduced a uterus cancer screening program which targets women all over the country including those in rural areas who previously could not afford it, thus uplifting the health status of women, so as to have a healthy nation.

In the past two decades there were no female chiefs in Zimbabwe. Although still very few, at least the government has realised the need to include female chiefs in the traditional structures and development programmes in rural areas. Currently Zimbabwe has six female

chiefs (Langa op cit). Women (even those in Zaka District) are more than willing to become chiefs or village heads but have not been afforded the chance by the system.

The Heifer project also dotted around the district assists in the empowerment of women to a greater extent. Although this government initiative targets everyone in the district most beneficiaries are women. The project is run through giving an individual a heifer for free for two years and calve(s) it gives birth to belong to the person while the same heifer is moved to the next person. Under every chief the researcher met at least two women who testified to this effect.

## **5.5 QUESTIONNAIRES**

The researcher distributed two hundred questionnaires at the rate of fifty per each of the four chiefs. All in all, one hundred and forty nine were completed and returned. Response rate on questionnaires was seventy four comma five percent (74, 5%) (n=149) making it a high response rate. The researcher did not achieve a hundred percent response rate because some participants did not return the completed questionnaires and others returned them incompletely filled in.

### **5.5.1 How roles are allocated in homes**

The researcher asked a question on how gender roles are allocated between boys and girls in families and homes. The participants gave various responses. The respondents noted that young boys and girls perform the same chores in most households. However, as boys and girls grow up, these roles tend to be divided with girls concentrating on household chores or indoor work while boys concentrate on outdoor activities such as gardening, herding cattle, and many others. Girls are more attached to the homes than boys. The respondents argued that this is done to prepare them for their future roles as husbands and wives. Despite the fact that this lays a strong foundation for both boys and girls, it cannot be disputed that this is

tainted with colonialist aspects that relegated both girls and women to lower levels of the society. The table below shows how gender roles are currently allocated in most families.

**Table 4: Gender roles**

<b>MALES</b>	<b>FEMALES</b>
1.Gardening	1.Washing
2. Cutting wood	2.Cooking
3.Clearing and tilling the land	3. Cleaning the house
4.Herding domestic animals	4.Feeding children
5.Other menial jobs	5. Sweeping surroundings

**Source: Research 2019**

### **5.5.2 Opportunities offered for boys and girls in homes**

When asked on the opportunities offered in homes for the boy and the girl child, the researcher discovered that about fifty percent (50%)(n=75) of the respondents said that boys and girls are offered equal opportunities while the other fifty percent (50%)( n=75) of the respondents said more opportunities are given to the boy child. The questionnaires reflected that about seventy one comma four percent (71,4%)(n=100) parents still have the mentality that girls will marry into other families and uplift those families whilst boys remain home and guarantee continuity of their families hence the need to invest more in them. The proverb that describes their mindset is *Ane mhuri kwayo ndeane ndume ane munhukadzi vaeni* (One with a real family is one who has boys, one with a family of girls has strangers).

### 5.5.3 Socio-economic life and gender

Information gathered pointed to women as contributing more to the socio-economic life in communities. In the villages most of the cooperative projects called *Mushandira* (which means working together) are run by women and very few men at ratio of one to four (1: 4). At least four of these *Mushandira* projects are found under each chief. And members in each of them range from twenty to thirty- five per garden. The number of male participants also ranged from five to eight on each *Mushandira* with female participants ranging from sixteen to twenty seven. Thus of all the *Mushandiras* under the four chiefs men constituted about a quarter of the total people while women constituted remaining three quarters of the people.

The projects include gardening, knitting and road and garden repair works. Gardening dominates the projects and is done in the *Mushandiras*. The researcher also gathered that from these gardens women get relish as well as money to run their homes from the garden proceeds. The women commented that this makes it easy for them to look after their families, since most of their husbands are not formally employed because of high rate of unemployment in the country. Such findings clearly show that women still continue to wield economic power though much of it was trimmed by colonialists through their misrepresentation of women history in Zimbabwe. The table below indicates projects under each chief.

**Table 5: Projects taking place around Zaka district**

CHIEFS	PROJECTS				
	Gardening	Markets	Roadside selling	Road repair	Knitting
Chief A	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Chief B	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Chief C	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chief D	✓	✓	✓	✓	X

**Source: Research 2019**

The researcher also observed that some women run ‘markets.’ Some cross borders and bring various items then move around these markets selling their goods that include *mabhero*, (second hand clothing) grocery items, and building materials. These markets take place around the district at designated, usually central and accessible rendezvous. Also specific and consistent dates are set aside for each market day in every chief’s area.

Another contribution made by the women is farming. Zimbabwe’s economy is agro-based and the government provides inputs annually through the presidential inputs scheme. This is usually parcelled to needy families including widows. This goes a long way in providing food security for most widows and other disadvantaged families. Such attempts are meant to empower women so that they continue to sustain their families even in the absence of a father figure in their lives. Most women in Zaka district harvest various proceeds from their fields and sell them. These include sweet potatoes, vegetables and tomatoes. Some gather fruits like oranges, avocados and naartjes from trees in their homesteads and sell them by the roadside.

Other women gather fruits like *mazhanje/mashuku* (sugar plums), guavas, *matohwe* (snot apples) and many wild fruits and sell all these by roadsides. They also gather mushrooms, wild okra and other traditional vegetables from forests and sell them. Thus most women in the district contribute quite significantly to the socio-economic life of their families. Reference has already been made to the proverb *mukadzi igonzo* which refers to their versatility in fending for their families. In the process, they are economically empowered as they learn to control their financial life. They also gain negotiation skills given that they deal with complex customers who are in transit and those who are locally-based.

Road repairs are usually done voluntarily on *chisi* (a sacred day for rest) and are no longer very common around the district since there are no longer monetary benefits from the project as it used to be two decades before. Also knitting projects have stopped since the exporters of the finished items are no longer coming for the reasons unknown to the people of the district who assume that the exporters have since relocated. Those still practising knitting are doing it as pass time.

#### **5.5.4 Aspects of Karanga culture that hinder women development**

Respondents cited some of the aspects of Shona-Karanga culture which hinder women from realising their full potential. The following aspects were pointed out;

##### **5.5.4.1 Marriage**

Respondents cited that in most Shona-Karanga societies marriage is a virtue that was and still being celebrated by many and as a result, every women strives to get into marriage. Some are so obsessed with the idea of marriage to the extent that they leave school and get into marriage whilst they are still very young. By so doing they give up on their dreams and goals. Their vision of higher life becomes centred on their husbands. At times this does not materialise. Given that our traditions and culture have been eroded by cultural imperialism, a good number of marriages do not last. As they crumble, they disempower women to an extent

that some even resort to anti-social activities like prostitution in order to earn a living. Some are also into polygamy because of desperation to marry. All this has a negative bearing on women's lives and prevent them from realising their full potential.

#### **5.5.4.2 Childbearing**

While child bearing is a biological function that is God given, it was also discovered that a number of women cling to child up bringing at the expense of personal development and advancement. Thus most women do not live their lives but live for their children, depriving themselves many opportunities and luxuries. Women in Shona societies still value children and other women; for the love of children bear children even if they are not married. This has led to sacrifices that have impacted negatively on women's lives. In some cases, men forbid their women to take up jobs or pursue their careers for fear of being surpassed in earnings. This has also promoted suppression of women's talents.

At the end these women fail to look after these children alone thus compromising the welfare of these children. Some fail to complete their education or look for jobs because they do not have anyone to leave their children with. Thus even if such women want to develop themselves, they cannot do so because children would have become a hindrance for the woman to realise her full potential.

#### **5.5.4.3 Genuine sisterhood**

In Shona Karanga societies, a woman has to assist another woman when in trouble. Some women spend time trying to assist other members of the family and eventually failing to realise her full potential. A woman who excels more than others of her species is considered selfish, greedy and is suspected of using sorcery at the expense of others.

#### **5.5.4.4 Extended families**

From the respondents the researcher was given extended families as another aspect of the Shona-Karanga culture that may hinder development in women. The Shona-Karanga culture



values extended families and at times because of these ‘trailers’ one cannot realise her full potential because she has relatives to look after. The relatives and own children become an overload for some women hence they fail to realise their full potential. This has also been referred to as ‘black tax’ by some scholars especially those with Eurocentric views. Looking after one’s siblings and parents at the expense of self-development indeed minimises chances of women advancement too.

#### **5.5.4.5 Patriarchal Societies**

Some respondents cited patriarchal societies as another aspect that may hinder development of women. The Shona –Karanga families are mostly patriarchal. As a result the male child is given preferential treatment as compared to the females. The male child is considered superior than the female one and this disadvantages women. This reduces commitment and self confidence in female citizens especially those who stick to self-fulfilling prophecy which may treat them as non-achievers in life.

#### **5.5.4.6 Submissiveness**

Respondents gave submissiveness as another factor hindering women from realising their full potential. The Shona- Karanga communities encourage women to be submissive to their male counterparts. This is done to avoid verbal and physical confrontation in homesteads which tends to destabilise harmony. These women become submissive at the expense of their own self actualisation. Everything she does revolves around the man hence she cannot fully develop herself without approval from the men. Some women get obsessed with the idea of making their man happy even at the expense of their advancement.

### **5.6 OBSERVATIONS**

The researcher also went on to make some observations within Zaka District. The researcher looked at some art and paintings in homes if they would communicate anything about the status and role of women. She also observed men and women carrying out duties to see how

work is distributed between males and females. The researcher also observed the chores carried out by women in public gatherings. Generally, the researcher discovered that the role and status of women depicted in art, paintings and women's work during public gatherings agreed squarely with the roles and status depicted in the proverbs discussed above.

### **5.6.1 Art and paintings**

The researcher observed that most women keep their homes smart especially the kitchen which is central in any home. From the researcher's observations, most women decorate their homes using mud and cow dung. The picture below is an example of the traditional kitchen hut in one of the homes in one of the villages in Zaka District.



**Figure 5: Traditional kitchen**

**Source: Research data 2019**

From the above photograph, the researcher concluded that the hut (traditional kitchen) belongs to the woman considering the type of utensils that are on the traditional shelf. This is the woman's office from which she feeds and nourishes the family.

Most traditional rituals take place in the kitchen, on a bench like space below the traditional shelf named *chikuva* in Shona-Karanga communities. From the respondents the researcher learnt that it is at *chikuva* again where members of the family communicate with ancestors, making the kitchen a religious place especially the *chikuva*. Other rituals which include mourning of deceased, *kurova guva* (bringing back the spirit of the dead), appeasing the dead men's spirits and many others also take place there. It is again used for day to day running of the homestead and such activities as cooking, eating and relaxing are done there.

Decorations made in homes display the skills woman have, for instance, women pounding, grinding on grinding stones thus preparing food for the family. Some of the paintings depict what happens in homes especially the kitchen for example women cooking and serving food. The researcher found wall hangers in most homes printed the words MUSHA MUKADZI and WELCOME VISITORS. These two prints describe the hospitality and warmth women provide in homes. The artefacts below depict the need for peace, love and blessings at home.



**Figure 6: Artefacts to depict love, peace and blessings**

Usually it is the women who buy such wall hangers to communicate their minds and thoughts to members of the household and visitors. Activities around the home and happiness of many people revolve around them. Male interviewees admitted that it is difficult for them to receive, entertain, feed and accommodate visitors in the absence of their wives. Thus naturally and instinctively women play a prominent role in homes. They are the real powerhouses in Shona communities. Some of the displays reflect the social and aesthetic values that are characteristic of many women. For instance wall hangers made of reeds and woven strings, winnowing pans (*tsero*) and winnowing baskets (*tswanda*) with some words inscribed on them. Some of these artefacts are shown in the pictures below.



**Figure 7: Decorative artefacts**

**Research Data 2019**

### **5.6.2 Duties performed by women at public gatherings**

The researcher observed what women were doing at various functions within the district. The roles played by the women were similar although the functions were different. To summarise the roles played by women at different functions the researcher tabulated them below.

**Table 6: Roles played at different functions**

TYPE OF GATHERING	ROLES PERFORMED
1.Weddings	Receiving visitors, Cooking, entertainment, washing hands of guests, serving food, cleaning utensils
2.Political rallies and gatherings	Singing, serving food, washing utensils
3. Funerals	Cooking, singing, serving food
4. Church gatherings	Singing, cooking, serving food
5. Traditional ceremonies	Preparing millet, brewing beer, safeguarding ritual beer, cooking, serving food
6. Lobola payment	Welcoming visitors, preparing food, serving food, taking part in negotiations

**Source: Research Data 2019**

The researcher observed that the common role played by women is provision of food. This best describes the women's role in the community. Deke (op cit) concurs with the duties and roles above and argues that during traditional religious rituals, women's duties of cooking washing, and cleaning are not simple chores, but have religious significance. Furthermore, women function as religious practitioners, cultic figures and priestesses.

During funerals, women as mothers who bear children and bring them up, remain close even at death. They will be singing and dancing throughout the night by the sides of the deceased. The women are closer to the deceased than men who spend the night outside. Thus women

are there at birth and death. This shows the significance of women to the living and the dead. They are therefore, the cornerstone of Shona-Karanga communities.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Data gathered by the researcher points to the importance and the high status accorded to women in Shona-Karanga communities. Women also have to understand their role and status as reflected in Shona proverbs as this will assist them realise their original status in the society. This research has also demonstrated that contrary to the general view that Karanga women were objects of oppression in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, they are actually pillars of strength. It has been made clear that women are the pivot of the Shona-Karanga way of life socially, religiously and economically among other crucial aspects of life. The misconceptions and misunderstanding of the position of Karanga women has been clarified as well.

When sifting through this key area, one needs to realise that Karanga women only suffered demotion from their esteemed positions by the inception of the monetary economy that was a product of the colonisation of Zimbabwe. As a way of correcting this colonial misdeed, the government is trying to restore the lost glory of Karanga women. Government initiatives also aim at uplifting or placing women back to their original and high status accorded to them in Shona – Karanga communities. Efforts by the government include emphasis on taking pride in our local culture.

To women it also means taking delight in their local language in which rich proverbs are derived from. Once this is done successfully, women themselves will come to realise that they were real heroines before their true history was taken away by misinformed Eurocentric scholars and their sympathisers. Women are being uplifted through various programs and organisations which aim at uplifting the girl child such as CAMFED and Regai Dzive Shiri

which solely seek to empower the girl child who happens to be the leaders and mothers of tomorrow.

## **6 CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary, overall findings and reflections of the study. It also discusses benefits gained from the research study and makes recommendations and suggestions for further study.

### **6.2 Summary**

This research was conducted in Zaka; one of the districts of Masvingo province of Zimbabwe from 2017 to 2019. The research study is an inquiry into the place and role of African women in Shona culture of the Karanga people of Zaka district of Zimbabwe as depicted in Shona proverbs. The researcher examined proverbs with meanings relating to women and those with general meanings but derived from the roles, functions and importance of women. The research revealed that in Zimbabwe today, women are looked down upon and are treated as second class citizens in most communities. Women themselves have not only taken part in inventing this social imbalance but have also accepted this position resulting in most of them relying on their male counterparts for their daily upkeep and sundry forms of socio-political and economic support. This has undeniably weakened women in most aspects of life.

The research sought to establish the status of women in Shona-Karanga societies as reflected in and by the Shona proverbs and correct the misconception that African culture subjugates and oppresses women, a perception prevalent in most communities. It also sought to change women's negative attitude towards themselves. The researcher looked at various perceptions about women in different societies. Literature review on the global, African and Zimbabwean perceptions showed that women were looked down upon and were considered as second class citizens.



The researcher conducted a survey with two hundred and ten (210) participants of which the majority were women around the district of Zaka. Involvement of more women was done to validate the research findings. Besides that, women were the hinge-pin of this research study, hence a bias towards them in terms of participation. The researcher also investigated the status of women during the three phases that they went through in Zimbabwe's history namely; the pre-colonial, colonial and the post colonial periods. These phases were taken into consideration in order to attain in-depth information about Shona-Karanga culture and women in Zimbabwean communities. This assisted the researcher to come up with informed conclusions and recommendations.

Questionnaires were therefore filled in by participants whose ages ranged from eighteen to sixty five years of age, with the majority being women. Interviews and group discussions were also carried out around the district. These research methods were added to questionnaires so as increase objectivity and validity of the research results. The researcher randomly selected an equal number of participants under the four chiefs of Zaka district namely Ndanga, Nyakunhuwa, Nhema and Bota.

Observations were also made on women's duties on various functions that took place around the district in order to discover the roles played by women and the extent to which they controlled the events. The researcher also observed various artefacts by women in their homes and what they depicted in terms of women's role and place in the family. Through these artefacts, the researcher got a wealth of information in relation to the place and position of women of women in Karanga societies in Zimbabwe.

The research study has revealed that contrary to Eurocentric views which gave a warped perception of Shona-Karanga culture, the Karanga culture holds women with high esteem. Evidence was gathered from Shona proverbs concerning women which pointed towards the

fact that women are highly regarded in Shona-Karanga culture. It was also evident that women themselves are not aware of the provisions of their culture in terms of how much value it places on women. They are also not aware of some of the proverbs concerning themselves. As a result of this ignorance, women were easily swept off their feet by the Western culture which they welcomed as their liberators.

The propaganda that was postulated by the white settlers painted Shona-Karanga culture as backward and inconsiderate to women so it was readily accepted. Thus women wrongly blamed their own culture for their predicament and glorified Western culture as their source of liberation. It was also evident that the introduction of the monetary economy by whites rather than the Shona-Karanga culture upset gender roles and advantaged men more than women. Women became economically dependent on men, a situation which persists up to the present day. In the light of the evidence above, the noble way for women to regain their lost status is by way of going back to the Shona-Karanga culture which places value in its women.

### **6.3 Overall findings**

The researcher discovered that there are many proverbs about women in Shona figurative language. However, the generality of the people have knowledge on general Shona proverbs but have limited knowledge on those Shona proverbs that have to do with women and their meaning. Some participants not only failed to state some of the proverbs but could not give their meaning as well. The majority of the participants pointed towards the Shona culture as the major impediment for women to recognise their full potential in most communities. Generally, women themselves have accepted that they are indeed a relegated species and as a result many of them do not recognise their full potential. As such the predicament of women is in part self-made. The truth and reality point out that they are part of the solution if anything at all has to be done to liberate them from the shackles of colonialism.

The research established that the pre-colonial period is equally blamed for the diminishing status of women which many governments seek to address. The majority of the women take the colonial period as the age of awakening. They perceive Western culture as their liberator from the oppressive African culture. The post colonial period is taken as the most beneficial and sophisticated era in the development of women. This period saw the introduction of equal rights which allowed women to go to work (like their male counterparts) to fend for themselves and their families, introduction of laws and policies for the upliftment of women. However, the fact that women could also be formally employed seems again to be an extra burden for most women. Women have to go to work as well as perform household chores at home whilst men sat back after work and watched the women working. In addition, men complained that the majority of working class women have difficulties de-rolling when they are at home.

The analysis of the duties performed by women and the Shona proverbs on women show that the Shona culture regards women with high esteem. Everything in the home revolves around the woman hence the most common proverb *Musha mukadzi*. In the past up to the present, the woman was and remains pivotal in the home and this gives her a high status. Government efforts are also geared towards the development of the female child and uplifting her status through the introduction of programmes biased towards the girl child. NGOs also support the girl child and extend their helping hand to the rural girl child in order to develop her hence the motto 'Educate the girl child and you will have educated the nation.'

#### **6.4 Benefits**

The study of Shona proverbs concerning women enabled both men and women change their attitude towards each other. Males recognised the importance of the roles played by women in homes and the society and women no longer looked down upon themselves. Women also developed a positive attitude towards themselves and their culture. They were able to reflect

on their social and economic history and ‘see where the rain started beating them.’ Many women started to see the potential in them. The positive perceptions of Karanga culture and the legal framework offered a conducive environment for women’s development.

## **6.5 Recommendations**

In the light of the major findings of this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations;

### **6.5.1 Recommendations for future practice**

1. More campaigns on uplifting the status of the girl child be done in rural areas,
2. Government should embark on affirmative action policy to offer more educational programs and employment opportunities that benefit the girl child from primary school level and women respectively,
3. The responsible ministry should look for more cooperating partners and NGOs to work in the rural areas so as to conscientise the girl child and women on their role and status in society,
4. The curriculum in schools should be improved so that it gives more attention on Shona figurative language especially proverbs and Shona culture in relation to the role and status of women in society,
5. Most importantly, more literature on Shona-Karanga culture, language and gender studies before the colonial period should be developed and availed for girls and boys in the schools and men and women outside the school system so that they appreciate the Shona – Karanga culture especially gender roles.

### **6.5.2 Recommendations for future research**

In the light of the major findings of this study, the researcher suggests that further research be carried out on the role of men in pre- colonial times and the extent to which men have

abrogated or maintained these roles today. There is also need for a study on Shona – Karanga figurative language concerning men, the role and status accorded to men in proverbs and idioms and how these roles complemented women’s roles. More studies on the status and role of women as reflected in Shona figurative language (other than proverbs) such as idioms, similes, metaphors and even riddles. Further study should also be done on the effect of the monetary economy and Western culture on gender roles among the Shona-Karanga people.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Age (Tick the appropriate range)

18-25 yrs	26-35yrs	36-45yrs	46-55yrs	56-65yrs

2. Level of education (Tick the appropriate level)

Primary	O level	A level	College	Degree

3. Marital status

Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed

4. Profession

5. Employment status

6. Who is the bread winner(s) in the family?

--	--

7. Explain how gender roles are allocated in your family?

.....

.....

.....

8. Does your family offer equal opportunities for both boys and girls? Explain.

Yes/No (Tick the appropriate)

.....

.....

9. Does your society promote the advancement of girls/women? Yes/No

If Yes explain how.

.....

.....

.....

10. In your opinion, who is contributing more to the community socio-economic life; males of females? (Tick the appropriate) Explain.

.....

.....

11. Are there any aspects of Karanga culture that hinder women from realising their full potential in life? Explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

## **Appendix 2**

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Good morning/ afternoon.....

I am a student at the University of South Africa, Department of African Languages. I am carrying out a research on the topic ‘The place and role of women as depicted in proverbs among the Karanga culture of Zaka district of Zimbabwe.’ You are kindly requested to participate freely in this discussion. The ideas you will give will shade light on my research topic. Information collected will be specifically for the purpose of this study and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

1. State duties which were specifically for women in the Shona traditional culture?
2. Give examples of proverbs of concerning women and explain their meaning in relation to the roles performed by women?
3. What were men’s duties in pre- colonial Zimbabwe?
4. Explain how these men and women’s duties complemented each other in the pre-colonial period?
5. Explain how colonialism affected gender roles in Zimbabwe?
6. Were these changes good or bad? Support your answer?
7. Describe the duties of men and women in post -independence Zimbabwe?
8. Of the three phases that is, pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial period which phase do you think accorded women their original/rightful status? Give reasons.
9. Are there any challenges that come from the roles performed by women today? Explain.
10. How can women be assisted to overcome some of these challenges?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Observation schedule**

1. Paintings and art in homesteads
2. Wall hangers in various homes
3. Observing women carrying out their daily chores
4. Roles played by women at various public gatherings

## **Appendix 4**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE ELDERLY**

Good morning/ afternoon.....

I am a student at the University of South Africa, Department of African Languages. I am carrying out a research on the topic ‘The place and role of women as depicted in proverbs among the Karanga culture of Zaka district of Zimbabwe.’ You are kindly requested to participate freely in this discussion. It will take about twenty minutes of your time. The ideas you will give will shade light on my research topic. Information collected will be specifically for the purpose of this study and will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

1. How best do you describe the status of women today?
2. What do you observe in your community which is being done differently from the past by women? State whether it is good or bad.
3. How do you compare the status of women today and in the past?
4. What do you think caused the changes in the status of women from what it was in the past?
5. Are there any government initiatives to promote the welfare and advancement of the girl child in your area? State and explain these initiatives



## Appendix 5

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR  
MIN. OF LOCAL GOVT. PUBLIC  
WORKS & NATIONAL HOUSING  
25 JAN 2019  
P. BAG 29 Z, ZAKA  
ZIMBABWE

UNISA  
university  
of south africa

No objection

TEMPLATE PERMISSION LETTER

**Request for permission to conduct research in Zaka District**

"AN INQUIRY INTO THE PLACE AND ROLE OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN SHONA CULTURE OF THE KARANGA PEOPLE OF ZAKA DISTRICT OF ZIMBABWE AS DEPICTED IN SHONA PROVERBS."

25 January 2019

ZINANGA VICTOR  
CP No 3036, DA's Complex  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
0774 379 186 zinanga.v@gmail.com

Dear District Administrator, (MR NYEDF NSEMA)

I, Sapiencia Chisadza am doing research with Professor Mutasa D.E, a professor, in the Department of African Languages towards a, Master of Arts Degree at the University of South Africa. I have funding from the University of South Africa for carrying out a research study. I am inviting the people of Zaka district to participate in a study entitled: "An inquiry into the place and role of African women in shona culture of the karanga people of Zaka district of Zimbabwe as depicted in Shona proverbs"

University of South Africa  
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Tel: +27 12 429 3111 Fax: +27 12 429 4150

This research study aims at reconstructing the traditional status accorded to Karanga women in African culture through the study of Karanga proverbs. It seeks to change the attitude of men towards women and women towards themselves and correct the misconception that African culture looks down upon women and perpetuates a dependency syndrome among Karanga women on their husbands or men for survival. It will enable the Karanga women reclaim their lost status and enable them to fully contribute towards family, community, and national development. It will also help to unpack colonial myths and restore the dignity of Karanga women.

Your district has been selected because it is my district of origin and is a Karanga speaking people stronghold and is nearer to my workplace. The study will entail Focus Group discussions, interviews and observations with selected people on matters of interest.

The benefits of this study are to raise awareness of African culture amongst African men and women of various ages, backgrounds and occupations. It will appraise women of their role and status in the Karanga communities.

There are no potential risks anticipated in this research study.

Feedback procedure will entail making available research findings to the participants and other stake holders.

Yours sincerely



Chisadza Sapiencia.

Reasearcher.



### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, Moreblessing Mudyiwa confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and the researcher has explained to me in a language that I understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interviews.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname.....M. Mudyiwa Moreblessing

Participant Signature.....M. Mudyiwa.....Date 25/01/2019

Researcher's Name & Surname SAPIENCIA CHISADZA (please print)

Researcher's signature.....S. Chisadza.....Date 25/01/2019

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, PANASHE MANDIOPERA confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and the researcher has explained to me in a language that I understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interviews.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname PANASHE MANDIOPERA

Participant Signature [Signature] Date 25/01/19

Researcher's Name & Surname SAPIENCIA CHISADZA (please print)

Researcher's signature [Signature] Date 25/01/2019